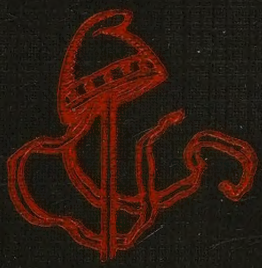
SINCERITY

A Story of Our Time

John Erskine



SINCERITY

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JOHN ERSKINE

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DRAMA

Hearts Enduring

SINCERITY

A Story of Our Time

By

JOHN ERSKINE

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Part One

THE CASE, FROM THE OUTSIDE

SINCERITY

THE CASE, FROM THE OUTSIDE

JUDGE WHITE leaned back in his chair, faintly amused and not a little disturbed by the justice he had dispensed. On the desk before him lay his written opinion. He had settled the legal question, had done all that the parties to the suit had asked, and from what they had said when he questioned them, he knew they would be satisfied. But now, having decided the case according to what his conscience told him was sound equity, he still had no clear idea what the case really was about.

As he sat thinking, the horns of automobiles passing down the street came to him from the other side of his garden. The windows of the study were open, and with the fragrance of his early roses mingled this harsh noise of traffic, which had crept up to his door year by year, until there was left in the tide of the modern city only a small island of peace. Other disturbances no less disagreeable had overtaken his declining age—clashes and conflicts of a new world for which he had little use, and which he was content not to understand. Vulgarities. In his youth, commencing his long career in the law, he had turned instinctively from ignoble debates, as one would avert the eyes from what would be degrading to watch. Not that he was a prig—but life afforded enough difficulties on the highest plane to satisfy a strenuous mind.

He had always declined to plead, therefore, for husbands and wives who were sunk in quarrels and estrangements, or who otherwise disclosed the shabbiness of their souls. He had believed then that every disturbance of the home was the result of some fault, traceable and definable, on one side or the other. To be sure, his advancement to the bench had forced upon his attention, against his will, what he always referred to as the dry-rot of modern society—by which he meant that sex had only recently become a power for restlessness, and vows until now had carried a sacred obligation. His retirement because of age had brought at least this comfort, that he was free to enjoy the sane solitude of his home, in the midst of his garden, among beloved books, among serene reminders of his mother and father, long dead, examples of a generation on whom the virtues sat easily.

On the wall opposite his desk hung the portrait of his wife, also in her grave these many years. He could look up at that face, feminine, reticent, refined, and thank God for the too brief decades of companionship and understanding. Of course, if it had been his habit to rack his memory for disagreeable things, he might have recalled a certain restlessness which had possessed him in the first years, and which, by his greatest moral victory, he had lived down. There was that later period, too, when he had suspected his companion of a variableness fortunately temporary. But now, at his age, the pleasanter things remained and the ugly faded. He knew he had once lived in a better world, and regretted that he had endured into a turmoil which he knew was a calamity, and which he therefore preferred not to investigate too closely.

His appointment as a Special Master in Equity had seemed not a recall to the active world, but an enlargement of refuge and retreat. What use more fitting for his long experience than to make it available in his latest days for personal and imaginative distribution of absolute justice? With no little satisfaction, with extreme thoroughness, he unraveled curious tangles involving, for the most part, nothing more spiritual than real estate. The reformation of old and improperly drawn contracts, the impartial allotment of responsibilities and liabilities, afforded play for that philosophy which was instinctive in his temperament, and which long study had richly developed.

And now this case. He had been asked to separate certain interests, property rights, a mere matter of dollars and cents. Nothing more had been desired, not his moral opinion, certainly not his curiosity. Yet he found himself, at the end of his career, impatient to know three people intimately, their hidden lives, their loves and hates. His inconsistency did not escape him—he was inclined to smile a little at his weakness. No question but the case was shabbier than any he had ever avoided; if he really should find out the facts, it would probably prove a stench in the nostrils. He regretted that he must go to his grave without probing it to the depths.

Mr. Winthrop Beauvel and his wife Mary, of the township of Harrington, had asked the court to determine Mrs. Beauvel's share of the money they had invested in common. Mr. Beauvel did not desire to liquidate the investment, which was in real estate; he merely wished to buy out his wife's interest. It appeared that she had put into their joint venture certain moneys

which she had earned with her pen. She was, it developed, a novelist. Judge White had found himself unable to recall the titles of her works, and since the information was irrelevant, he had been careful not to ask for it. She and Beauvel were equally vague as to the amounts each had invested. In fact, their testimony on all specific points was reluctant. Yet they had entered into this litigation, not only to disentangle their property, but also to find out how much Beauvel owed her for being his wife during the past ten years.

That was their case, so far as they asked the court to help them.

Here again, it was the extra-legal aspect of the problem which had fascinated the judge. It was not really the two Beauvels who desired him to say what wages a wife deserves for living with her husband; this novel question came apparently from a third person, a woman, who accompanied them to court and stood ready, whenever their interest flagged, to urge them on. They called her Isabel.

When the hearing was almost at an end, Judge White had the shock of his life. A casual remark of the lawyer intimated that Isabel, too, as well as Mary, was Beauvel's wife. A long standing fear of deafness made the judge conclude that he had heard incorrectly, and he stopped the proceedings until thorough questioning put beyond doubt the fact that Mary, who had lived with Beauvel for ten years, who had called herself by his name, and who had invested money jointly with him, was not his wife at all, never had been, never desired to be. His wife was Isabel, the woman who seemed to be managing the case in the interest of all concerned. She had but

recently arrived from some foreign land, where she had maintained a residence for the last ten years. Yet all the time she had been the true Mrs. Beauvel.

The judge had got so far in his researches, when the lawyer representing the plaintiff courteously but firmly objected that these personal questions had nothing to do with the matter before the court, since the petition to separate the property rights was a joint plea, and there was no other dispute of any kind. Though the judge admitted the point, in fact apologized for excessive zeal in the pursuit of information, he wished to be set straight in one last matter, in which no doubt the learned counsel could be of aid. Had he heard correctly that the first Mrs. Beauvel, the pseudo one, was a novelist? The lawyer assured him he had heard correctly—she was Mary Allerton, well known in contemporary literature. But Judge White thought he had previously heard that the other Mrs. Beauvel, the real one, was also a novelist. Yes, the lawyer was glad to assure the court they were both of them novelists. The court was grateful for this enlightenment, and stared hard at the women to discover symptoms of the literary temperament.

Isabel, the legal but long absent wife, was a light blonde, about thirty-eight years old, he would say, about five feet six, not more than a hundred and thirty pounds. Her long oval face and wide blue eyes were rather attractive. A certain contrast between the gentleness of her manner and the persistence with which she kept at the work in hand, caught his attention. A warm-hearted woman, he would have thought, even a little conventional —except that he couldn't for the life of him guess why she had stayed away from her husband for ten years, nor still

less why she had come back; nor why she was so eager to confer upon the other woman, the usurper, a large part of the family property.

Mary Allerton appeared to be slightly younger—perhaps thirty-five, not quite so tall, and not quite so heavy—say five feet three, and a hundred and twenty pounds. Her hair was a brownish-red, her eyes dark brown, her face round. Perhaps she wasn't so warm-hearted as Isabel—or perhaps she was more so. Judge White was sure she was more sensitive, or more intelligent. He would have expected to discover in her, considering how she had been spending the recent years, a habitual boldness of some sort, but her life of sin had apparently left no traces. It was illogical, to say the least, that her face should be distinguished by an extreme innocence, by an unquestionable self-respect, even by a slight aristocratic reserve. She recalled to him the lithographs which had graced the walls of his father's house, portraits of the more admirable heroines in Victorian prose and verse. Had he not been aware of the stain on her life, he would have selected her out of any number of candidates to illustrate the old-fashioned type of woman he had admired in his youth.

Last of all he looked at Beauvel. A man must be a strange sort of weakling to mess up his life in unconventional escapades; he must be a fool to drag his affairs, or let them be dragged, into the publicity of a court-room. Why didn't he give up whatever money he had and get rid of her? But there again, it wasn't the woman, apparently, who wanted the money. The returned wife insisted on paying off her rival. No, it couldn't be that, either. Both those women were fine, whatever they had

done, or failed to do. And the man also was far above the average. Good-looking. Perhaps forty years old. Not over-tall—somewhere around five feet ten, in fair condition for his age—let's say a hundred and seventy-five pounds. Through his black hair areas of baldness threatened, but he had a youthful face, and under his small mustache his smile was quick and pleasant. When he moved in the room, or when he spoke, his manner was decisive yet poised, neither hasty nor slow. In some respects, undoubtedly a superior person.

That was what bothered the judge. These three people, as mad as March hares, yet all admirable! If the facts were as stated, those extraneous facts which had nothing to do with the case, then Isabel, the real wife, had gone away for ten years to live abroad, and Mary Allerton, her friend and fellow-novelist, had with her approval assumed her place and her name. At the end of the term of years, Isabel had returned, with no more reason apparently for coming back than for going away, and Mary, no longer needed, had obligingly moved out. All this, it seemed, with no protest from Beauvel, and all three, so far as the hostile eye of Judge White could detect, very friendly, and easy in their conscience.

From the case, as he had heard it in the court-room, he had learned no more than this. Now, in his study, listening to the city noises and smelling spring night over his garden, he wondered what those three could tell, were they so minded, of the motives which had driven them to a life different from that of their fellows. No doubt they were the children of old-fashioned parents, and possibly had spent their childhood in the midst of good influences and strict traditions. Why had they changed?

And why didn't the change show more clearly in their appearance?

Or to look at it more superficially, what did the township of Harrington think when it discovered, one morning, that Winthrop Beauvel's familiar wife of the past ten years was no wife at all, but that the strange woman who had dropped down upon him, as it were from the skies, was the spouse of his bosom, home from an unexplained vacation?

Or were these three so clever that the township of Harrington never found them out?

Judge White reminded himself that he was an officer of the law, to some degree the custodian of public order, of morals. Beyond a doubt, society should punish at least one of these three. Which one?

He was inclined to be hard on Beauvel—at least he would have been, had these personal aspects of the case come within his jurisdiction. And of course the woman should be criticized who had lived with Beauvel without due process of law. Then the only innocent party was Isabel, the wife. He wished he knew what she had been doing away from home all those years. To say truth, though she seemed gentle and warm-hearted, if he had to put himself in the power of either woman, he would rather trust himself to Mary, the one he had just blamed.

In fact, he was where he had begun—he knew nothing about it, and knowing nothing, he brought his meditations to a conclusion which he always found pragmatically satisfactory—he affixed his signature to his written opinion, closed the windows of his study against a possible shower in the night, and went to bed.

Part Two

THEY GO SINCERE

THEY GO SINCERE

I

Before the Beauvels moved to Harrington, the residence mentioned in the court proceedings, they had spent the early years of their married life in Fairfax. The town was small, but Winthrop had his business there, and Isabel thought the limitations of the place would be favorable for literary effort, as well as for romantic domesticity. Where there could be so little social stir, there could be no distractions under the guise of amusement to interrupt the flow of her inspiration. In the first twelve months of wedlock she had done most of the cooking and yet had contrived to finish a novel dealing with the early history of the Northwest. The background for her story she remembered from college lectures, and the plot and characters she fashioned out of her personal philosophy. Her hero had adventures and her heroine exercised patience until the miraculous hour which brought them into each other's arms. That was in the last chapter. But if the book had continued, you knew they would have at least two children, a boy and a girl, and as they approached middle age they would be sedentary and prosperous.

During the same year Winthrop made reasonable progress in his business. He was an agent for a furniture company which had devised machinery for reproducing the best colonial designs in large numbers and at

a low price. As a younger man he had sold insurance, an easy thing to begin with, and he had once thought of going into real estate, but shortly after his marriage he began to see the future of public utilities. Before he had been in Fairfax a year and a half, he had presented Isabel with a car, and had invested in the partial ownership of a garage. He had an instinct for investing in whatever he had to patronize. As to his ultimate destiny he had no clear ideas; he was an opportunist, ready for what fate should put into his hands to do.

After two years and a half Isabel produced her second novel and met Mary Allerton. The second story was strikingly like the first, but its success was greater, and Isabel found herself economically self-sustaining. She began dimly to perceive what it was her readers admired in her pages—the reverence for simple emotions, the sanity of the moral system, the logic of the incidents. She learned this not so much from the reviews—indeed, long after her success they remained tentative and condescending—but from the introductory remarks of the chairmen who presented her to women's clubs. She was often asked to speak. The women wished not so much to listen to her ideas as to see her. She gathered that what they saw was reassuring, especially to the older members, who had feared that their sex could not enter the practise of a profession, not even of letters, without loss of charm.

It was at one of these meetings that she met Mary Allerton, like herself a young and ambitious writer, but not as yet enjoying success. From the moment they spoke Mary admired her, and having no family ties whatever,

nothing but a small ancestral house and a narrow income, she sold the property and moved to Fairfax to be near Isabel. There for six months the two women compared their manuscripts almost daily and exchanged ideas. As Isabel said, it promised well for the culture of the place, that artists should foregather there.

Late in September the third year Isabel knocked one morning at Mary's apartment, on the second flight up in a private home where this one room was rented. Mary flung the door open. The sunlight streamed through the window and fell on book-filled shelves, on a round table covered with a red cloth, on the couch against the wall under the shelves. Between meals the table became a desk, at night the couch was converted into a bed.

They kissed each other affectionately.

"I'm awfully sorry to be late, Mary! I had something I wanted to show you, and I waited to finish the last page."

She began to open a large envelope, and spread the manuscript on the couch beside her. Mary drew up a chair.

"Good heavens! Don't tell, me it's another novel! It isn't decent to produce them so fast!"

"No, this time it's an essay."

Mary's interest fell off a little. She reached to the table for a package of cigarettes.

"I can't tempt you yet?"

"No, thanks—I really don't like them."

"You will some time."

She struck a match and waited for it to kindle. Her surreptitious smoking, known to no one but Isabel, gave

her in the smooth proprieties of Fairfax a sustaining sense of individuality. Isabel held the manuscript on her lap.

"What's the essay about? I didn't know you wrote that kind of thing."

"Never before, but these ideas I just had to put down, to save my soul. You know how it is, writing novels—you think so much about the behavior of your characters, after a while you begin to notice how real people live."

Mary nodded sympathetically.

"I'm not unhappy myself, you know—absolutely nothing to complain of—but I haven't been able to shut my eyes to what goes on in a town like ours. The life of the normal woman here is cramped, especially if she is supposed to be happy. That's the odd side of it—if she's supposed to be happy. She's caught in a very pleasant sort of prison."

"Are you speaking of the married or unmarried ones?"

"The married, of course."

They looked at each other a moment, Mary a little unsympathetic, Isabel scenting criticism.

"I've heard this before," Mary said, "but I can't see that the married ones have much to complain of. At least they have a man. They may not be entirely happy, but they've enjoyed a chance at a complete life."

Again they waited, with the challenge, however friendly, in their eyes.

"That," said Isabel, "is the point of my essay. Thinking of some of this modern literature about the unmarried women who experiment in all directions, I realized for the first time how much liberty a woman loses by being

married, especially if she's happy. It's just an idea, you understand—I couldn't have thought of it if I weren't happy myself."

"If a woman is happily married, why should she want any liberty?"

Isabel avoided a direct reply.

"If she's utterly unhappy, she can run away or get a divorce or something. But you can imagine how it is if she has nothing to complain of. She falls into a comfortable routine, she repeats herself, year after year, she uncovers no new interests—and as she nears middle age, she realizes that her soul is dwarfed, and it's too late to change."

Mary smoked her cigarette. She almost knew, but not quite, how to blow a ring.

"Isabel, why haven't you and Winthrop had children? That's what's the matter with you."

Isabel flushed slightly.

"I told you it's not my own case I've written about. Between Winthrop and me there's nothing wrong."

"Of course there isn't! You're just playing with a literary idea, and I hadn't the right to ask about the children."

"Oh, no," said Isabel. "I don't mind telling you. We've postponed them on account of my work. I suppose they'll come some day."

Mary shook her head.

"If I had a husband, they'd come at once. This is a quiet town we live in, and most places on the globe, I dare say, are in themselves unexciting. If you and I hadn't met, my life would have continued absolutely dull. I never knew a man worth losing a moment's thought on

—but then, I never traveled very far from home. I dare say children are nature's means of keeping us from going dead. If you had a child. you'd have to have some new ideas from time to time."

In Isabel's face she saw a look of wound and resentment.

"I'm speaking in general, Isabel—not about you."

"We have to make those choices for ourselves, Mary; we have to be sincere. I could pretend to want children because Winthrop did, but my real mission is to write."

As to that, Mary was disposed to raise no question. "Let's hear the essay," she said.

Isabel took up the manuscript as though ready to start off, then she hesitated.

"I don't know that I can read it to you now. You've jumped at a wrong interpretation of it, you'll think I'm talking of myself."

"No, I won't. I promise!"

"Well, I can't help feeling embarrassed."

Mary went over to the couch and in a quick gesture of affection took her hand.

"I'm awfully sorry, Isabel. This morning I'm particularly stupid—my nerves happen to be a little on edge. Don't mind me. I want especially to hear what's wrong with happy married women."

Isabel turned over the pages.

"Well, I shan't read it all—you've made me somewhat bashful about it. There are one or two passages—here, for instance: 'What the supposedly happy woman resents is the ignorance which her happiness forces upon her. If there are certain parts of life which good people ought to avoid, at least they have a right to know also what it

is they are avoiding. In our country, if we were to tell the whole truth, we should have to say that the model mothers of the nation are wrapped up in their virtues and in their lack of information as in a cocoon.' "

Mary interrupted.

"I'm not sure of the simile. How can you be wrapped up in a lack of information? And doesn't something come out of the cocoon later?"

Isabel took the criticism a bit stiffly.

"Of course, this is just the first draft. The idea is clear, isn't it?"

"Let's hear some more."

She turned a page, looked ahead, then went back to the place where she had stopped.

" 'If a woman feels that some of her capacities for growth are unexercised, she will resent it, even if it is her husband's love, or her love for him, which keeps her life sheltered and tranquil. After all, we are in this world to grow. Who has the right to say that any stage in our growth is perfect and complete? The husband, therefore, who provides a comfortable home for a woman, keeps from her all his worries, sees to it that she knows nothing of the problems which beset people less fortunate than herself, conceals from her those tragedies which result from a too adventurous thirst for experience, is perhaps not so kind a husband as he intends to be. Why should he know more of life than she? If the thought once takes hold of her that he wishes her to remain ignorant, the canker is at the heart of their happiness.' "

Mary was not deeply impressed, and Isabel found herself resenting the way her friend listened, half patient, a little absent-minded.

"Well, that's what the essay is about," she said, folding up the manuscript.

"Oh, don't stop, Isabel. Let's have some more of it. It's quite long, I can see."

"Would you really like to hear more?"

"Yes, indeed—really!"

This time Isabel turned boldly two or three pages.

"'The community, especially the small community, which thinks it is protecting and honoring woman, more often than not is stifling her mind. And when I say community, I must admit that women themselves, through their united public opinion, stifle each other. When I am entirely sincere, I respect my own curiosity to know more of life than I do, but at the same time I confess that if I were on the local library committee, charged with selecting books for other women to read, I should play safer for them than I should wish any one to play for me.'"

Mary was interested at last.

"That sounds like an honest note! Thank you for saying it. I've often wondered whether we really care to be sincere, or to be free. If we did, we might encourage those virtues or privileges in our sisters. Of course I know I'd be a cat myself if any of the women around here did what I'd like to do."

Isabel was pleased.

"I'm glad you like it. I put in a part at the end about the men."

"Oh, are they handicapped too?"

"You know, I haven't the faintest idea whether they are or not, but I thought I ought to add a few lines, just to show that my point of view wasn't one-sided."

Mary laughed.

"I like broad-mindedness. What did you say about them?"

Isabel turned toward the end of the manuscript, not over-eagerly. Mary's way of listening that morning, her latent irritability and her readiness to poke fun, were not the kind of reception an author likes.

"It's just a paragraph. Here it is:

" 'Men also suffer from the unintended limitations of what we call a happy home. Of few of them is it safe to say that their lives are complete. And this frustration, like that of the women, is the ironic result, more often than not, of genuine affection. They learn what their wives like, and loving their wives, they confine themselves to those habits, those ideas, those remarks. If they are tempted to live a little more widely, to explore, at least in thought, the mysteries of this rich span of days through which we pass too quickly, they usually keep the impulse hidden and brood in solitude over what ought to be of legitimate interest to their women as well as to themselves. I never see a respectable middle-aged man, head of his house and pillar of society, threatened by baldness and overweight, adored by his grateful spouse, without asking myself—in order to reach this complacent conclusion, what spirited thoughts has he refused to think?' "

"What do you call this essay?" Mary was studying her closely.

"The title is 'Sincerity.' "

"Do you define it anywhere?"

"No, I just use the word in the common sense."

"While you were reading, it occurred to me that being sincere is perhaps not so easy as we commonly suppose.

Perhaps there are several kinds of it—a sincerity of the mind, another of the heart, another of sex."

Isabel was putting the manuscript back in the envelope. She never liked Mary's blunt way of speaking of physical matters—a trick some spinsters cultivate who wish to appear at ease in the world, though unwed.

"Sincerity of sex?" she asked.

"Well, you know how flowers turn toward the sun, and all that sort of thing. I don't fancy that they idealize the sun, nor cherish any sentiment about it, but they can't help turning. That's a kind of sincerity, wouldn't you say? Perhaps some people, at some times, are caught in that kind. I gather that what you imply in your essay is a purely logical sincerity, a consistency of ideas. I've never been in love, not the real thing, but I can imagine loving utterly with my heart a man about whom I couldn't become very much excited in my mind. In that case I'd have to decide which sincerity to follow. The women who read this essay of yours—what do you wish them to do?"

"Be themselves, develop all their talents, satisfy all their worth-while curiosities."

Mary smiled half-mournfully.

"Isabel, I hadn't guessed how much Fairfax bores you, but I'm not surprised. If it weren't for you here, I couldn't stand it myself. Where are you going to publish the essay?"

Isabel was genuinely shocked.

"Oh, I couldn't publish it! People would think I was writing about myself. I'm really not, you know, it's just observation; but I couldn't expose myself to misunderstanding."

Mary looked at her quizzically.

"You wish to be sincere, and you think women ought to live out their impulses, at least the noble impulses, and you believe these ideas of yours are true, yet you are going to withhold them. In other words, you intend to act like that part of the feminine community which keeps other women in ignorance and servitude."

The argument troubled Isabel.

"If I thought it would do enough good to justify the sacrifice, if enough readers would see what I meant—— But how can I be sure how many women would read it with charity, let alone intelligence? Wouldn't they take me for one more of these discontented females, who wish to overthrow the home?"

Mary shrugged her shoulders.

"Maybe they would, and maybe that's what you are. When you say you haven't written about yourself, you think you are telling the truth, but I don't believe you. If these ideas were not connected somehow with your own life, they wouldn't have possessed you. Without knowing it, Isabel, you've written yourself down, and a good thing it is for you, too. Why not have faith in yourself? Publish it, and take the consequences. That's what I'd call sincerity."

For a moment Isabel considered.

"Do you think *The Atlantic Monthly* would print it?"

"If you send it to them, they'll tell you."

"Mary, I couldn't, not under my own name!"

"Well, then, under some other name. You have reputation enough already, haven't you? It's truth for its own sake you're after now. Publish the thing unsigned, let the ideas speak for themselves."

Isabel hesitated again.

"I suppose I could send it to the editor under my own name, and ask him to keep the secret. I'm sure that's done. And I might sign a pen-name."

"Of course, or none at all."

"I think I'll sign it Nora Helmer."

"Who's she? Oh, I remember—the *Doll's House* woman. Yes, that's fine."

Isabel looked at her, still a little worried.

"Somehow, I know it's a mistake to do it."

Mary crossed the room to the window and pulled down the shade where the sun was a little too bright.

"Isabel, when I first met you, I thought because of your great success that you had a stronger grip of life than I. I still think so, for the most part, but I can't understand why you lack courage to publish an essay in praise of sincerity. Nothing that you've written here sounds to me very startling. In fact, if you don't mind my saying so, the only thing that saves these ideas from sounding trite is the fact that you discovered them for yourself. If I were in your place, I'd publish under my own name. If you are happy with your husband, he must know it, there must be sympathy between you, he won't misread what your nature forced you to say."

"Theoretically you are right," said Isabel, "but I shan't sign it, and not for lack of courage, either. You can't understand, Mary, because—I'll speak with your own frankness—because you're not married. I'll sign it Nora Helmer."

II

In the Beauvel living room *The Atlantic Monthly* lay on the center table. Winthrop subscribed to it for the same reason that he had a piano in the parlor. He himself did not play.

When the March number appeared, containing the praise of Sincerity, Isabel wondered if he would read it. She had a guilty feeling every time his hand came near the familiar magazine cover. Would he never take it up? She was sure that if by bad luck he should open the pages, his eye would fall immediately upon what she had written, but for two evenings he confined himself to the newspaper and general conversation, and on the third night they went out to play bridge.

What Mary had said about her cowardice rankled in Isabel's memory. She knew now that she was a coward, not only afraid to sign her name to a truth she believed in, but unwilling that Winthrop should see that truth, even though he should not connect her with it. Her passive deceit was already building a wall between them. Partly out of shame, the fourth night she laid the magazine down on the table, spread open at the title of the essay. When he lighted his pipe after dinner, she busied herself with a book on the other side of the table, but she was aware that the moment was upon her. He raised the magazine carelessly, looked at the title, propped it up on his knee and began to read.

It mortified her that she had been dishonest with

him, and over so slight a thing, after all. She would have given a good deal for a clear conscience and an easy mind, to put her arm over his shoulder and ask what he thought of her latest work. Nothing had been further from her intention than to bring a shadow upon the good faith of their lives together, and she was the last person, she would have said, to resort to subterfuge. She had prided herself always on her honesty, in conduct and in thought. Here she was, however, deceiving Winthrop. That was the only word for it—deceiving him. She put down the book she could not read and got out some sewing.

Yet, at the same time, she was glad he was reading the words. Until that moment she had not known how eager she was to bring those thoughts of hers under his eyes. If only she had done it frankly, as Mary Allerton had advised! But however it had been done, she was glad he knew at last the peril she foresaw in a happiness too placid, like hers and his. When he spoke about the essay, as of course he probably would, she could confess the authorship, make light of her masquerading, perhaps pretend that she wanted his opinion unbiased, unprejudiced by his love for her.

But she wasn't prepared for him to speak so soon. He read through to the last line, and looked up at her.

"What sort of trash is this, Isabel?"

"What do you mean, Winthrop?"

"This article here on 'Sincerity'—I suppose you've been reading it. I found it open."

She tried to speak calmly.

"I have just begun it."

"Well, here, take it and finish it. I'm curious to know what a literary person like you thinks of this sort of

maudlin complaining. We hear enough of social injustice, nowadays, but this woman has them all beaten. What bothers her is that she's too happy. She says it's hard luck to have a good husband and a comfortable home."

It would have been well to break the news to him then, and explain the point of view before he fell deeper into error, but she hadn't the courage. With what terrible keenness Mary had seen through her! She was a coward. She took the magazine from him, and went through the pretense of reading her own words. But she blushed for shame. In her childhood she had felt this kind of guilt —half conscience, half conviction that she would shortly be found out and punished.

She thought it best to prolong the reading until he had gone to bed.

"Time to close up," he said. "Aren't you through with that stuff yet?"

"You go on. I'll finish it in a minute."

"What do you think of it as far as you've got?"

"Why, Winthrop, I can see what she meant. We'll talk about it when I've read it all."

He laughed.

"I didn't mean to spoil the evening for you. You probably had something important you would have preferred to do."

At breakfast next morning he had forgotten the incident, so far as she could see, but it was still on her conscience. She introduced it as she offered him his toast.

"Winthrop, that article you asked me to read last night has some good points. Perhaps you didn't understand it."

"Didn't I! I know the sort of woman who wrote it, and that's the main thing."

She kept her hand from trembling as she raised her coffee cup.

"You know what sort of woman she is?"

"Yes, the resolutely unhappy. The kind that God Almighty can't satisfy."

Celia, the colored maid, saved her just then by bringing in the mail and laying it beside her plate. Isabel sorted out the letters and gave her husband two of them. He opened them.

"Bills, of course!"

Isabel returned to the subject. "I don't think she was unhappy, Winthrop. She was only speaking of certain general principles. Some parts of the article seem to me reasonable. At least, I can imagine that what she said would be true of some women here in Fairfax."

Winthrop folded his napkin and got up to leave for his office.

"God help Fairfax, if there are many of them here! Has she written anything else?"

"Who?"

"Nora What's-her-name."

"Oh, that's not her real name, Winthrop."

"How do you know it isn't?"

"Why, Nora Helmer is the heroine of Ibsen's *Doll's House.* The writer preferred to be anonymous."

"Good for her," he said, disappearing through the door with his hat. "That's one time she had some sense."

They went to a dance that night at the country club, and for a while Isabel almost forgot the rift which was

widening between them. During the next few days, for reasons that she would have found it hard to explain, she stayed away from Mary Allerton. By an effort of will she forced her mind on a new story, and resolved to leave the domestic problems of the nation to take care of themselves.

But an evening came when they were home together, seated by the lamp, and Winthrop had *The Atlantic Monthly* again in his hand, opened at her article. She watched him read it through twice, some passages several times.

"Have you a copy of Ibsen's *Doll's House*, Isabel?"

She got it for him.

"Why do you want it, Winthrop?"

"This Nora Helmer is on my nerves. I'm going to know more about her."

That night she was the one to retire first. He was deep in his Ibsen. And at breakfast next day it was he who returned to the subject.

"Isabel, I was right! The woman who wrote that essay is essentially unhappy, or she would never have chosen that name."

She could think of no apt reply. It would be dangerous now to reveal too intimate an understanding of the essayist.

"She is essentially unhappy," he continued, "and I doubt the wisdom of printing her morbid complaints—least of all in a magazine that's supposed to be wholesome. That kind of literature should be kept out of the home."

In spite of caution, Isabel flared up.

"There, Winthrop, that's just what she said in the essay! When the community tries to protect itself, it becomes unjust to the individual, it suppresses truth."

She would have said more, but Celia came in.

"Truth? Bosh!"

To hide her feelings she began to look over the morning's mail. Usually she let her business affairs wait until he had left the house—meals, she thought, should be leisurely and courteous. But now she picked out a letter at random from the little pile the maid had left on the table. It was addressed to Nora Helmer, in care of *The Atlantic Monthly*, and forwarded to her. In a sudden terror she slipped it down in her lap where Winthrop couldn't see it.

"What's that?" he said. "Another bill?"

"Yes."

She hadn't meant to fib—she hated herself twice, for the falsehood, and because recourse to it was now instinctive.

"What's it for?"

"Oh, it's an old one—receipted."

He was satisfied.

"That's the kind I like."

When he wasn't looking she couldn't resist running her thumb over the edge of the other letters. There were two more addressed to Nora Helmer, and forwarded from the magazine. Here was a contingency she had not foreseen. She would have preferred to be bold, to leave the pile of envelopes in full view till he had left the house, but it really was too reckless. She slipped them all into her lap and covered them with her napkin. Luckily his thoughts were still on the essay.

Once secure in her room, she feverishly opened the three letters, tore the envelopes into small pieces and threw them into the waste-basket. She noticed how her hand was shaking as she began to read. Really, she had done nothing wicked, and there was no sense at all in her nerves going back on her. . . . Moreover, now that she had looked at them, these three letters were rather nice to receive. They were from women in different parts of the country, grateful for her courage in speaking out for their sex. They said it in different terms, but they all had the same message. Isabel felt a sudden justification, a release of pride that what she had imagined had come close to the truth. Here were these people, far distant from each other, all strangers, yet all endorsing her account of their life. She saw in a flash a new power which comes from sincerity, a new unity possible for the human race. If you only looked in your heart and reported accurately what was there, you would be speaking for your neighbors. The fact struck home so vividly, she thought she must be the first who really understood it.

As the morning wore on, her nervousness disappeared, and her old confidence in life reasserted itself. She wrote letters of thanks to her three correspondents, telling them that more than they could possibly know they had encouraged her. Authors, she said, have to write somewhat in the dark, unless their most flattering readers follow a generous impulse and tell them where they are right or wrong. The composition of these replies gave her the mental attitude of a well-established author. Unconsciously she chose phrases which implied that this experience of flattery was not new. Indeed, by

the time she penned the third letter, she had become a veteran in receiving praise.

To such an extent did her spirits rise that after lunch she called on Mary Allerton. Mary was deep in a manuscript of her own, but showed herself glad to be interrupted. No longer nervous or irritated, she had resumed her subordinate post of disciple and admirer. Isabel knew they were on a cordial footing again. She brought out her tributes, and with unselfish pleasure Mary read them.

"Well, if I ever got such praise as that, I'd know authorship was really my vocation. You're glad now you wrote the essay, aren't you?"

"I certainly am."

"Just think what you would have missed, and what these women would have missed, if you had kept this to yourself. It's extraordinary how the influence of a few words can spread."

Isabel felt like assenting, but thought it more modest to wait for Mary to continue.

"Are these all you have?"

"Indeed yes! It seems a great many—three in one day."

"If they've begun to come in, there will be more of them. I suppose you would have heard earlier if the letters hadn't been addressed to the magazine. . . . What does Winthrop think about them?"

"Winthrop? Of course he knows nothing at all!"

"I forgot. Of course. . . . Isabel, it will be embarrassing to receive these letters! Won't he find out from the address? If he ever saw one, he'd know who the author was."

Isabel turned a little red, and the instinct to fib came back, but she resisted it sharply—from now on, nothing but the sincere truth.

"When I saw the first of these letters on the table this morning, I slipped them all into my lap so he couldn't see."

Mary started to laugh, but turned quickly serious.

"My dear Isabel, aren't you making a ghastly mistake? Why don't you tell him now? The longer you wait, the harder it will be. It's absolutely ignominious to be afraid to read your morning mail."

"But I can't tell him now—it's too late. He doesn't approve of the article."

"He has read it, has he? What do you care whether he approves or not?"

"I—I pretended I knew nothing about it. I deceived him a little. I fibbed to him."

She hated to see in Mary's face the look of reproach, perhaps of disgust.

"Isabel, I'm disappointed in you. For a woman of your ability and your character, to let yourself drift into an entanglement so absurd, is a disgrace to our sex. I think I'll save you from further trouble by going over and telling him myself."

Isabel knew she need not be taken literally.

"I don't like to joke about it," she said. "I have made a mistake with Winthrop, but it will blow over in a little while. Perhaps no one else will write me about the essay. I'll tell Celia when she sets the table not to put the mail by my plate."

"There you are! Another deception. Isabel, if you have any self-respect left, you'll let Celia lay out the

envelopes boldly where he can look at them if he wants to."

Isabel made no reply, and the silence between them was awkward. Mary made an effort to be light-hearted again.

"Don't let's be tragic. You might as well get some fun out of it, Isabel. I have an idea—always bring the letters over here to read. I'll keep them for you."

A faint suggestion of relief came over Isabel's face.

"I wish I could tell the magazine to send them here."

Mary shrugged her shoulders.

"How elaborate life can become, once we are sincere!"

Isabel did not like her tone. Mary's one fault, she admitted, was an occasional levity.

For a few days there were no more letters addressed to Nora Helmer, then three or four came in a group, then after another interval seven or eight together. Isabel had begun by following the counsel of courage, and had received her morning mail boldly on the daily breakfast table, but the day the seven or eight arrived, the mere bulk of them frightened her. Winthrop did not see them, however, nor saw any importance in them, and she got the package safely to her room. She resolved never to expose herself again to such a bad scare. It wasn't worth it. She would ask the editor to forward no more tributes—to keep them till she should call for them. The first praise had thrilled her, but the letters since, read furtively alone, and later in the day to Mary, had been disappointing, banal, commonplace. It was amazing how one's best ideas could evoke admiration from stupid people. These correspondents this morning, for example

—they had imperiled her happiness with Winthrop, merely by writing, yet she doubted if they had anything to say. One communication in the second instalment had been by exception uncomplimentary—the writer had given his opinion that Nora Helmer, whoever she was, was a damn' fool who didn't know when she was well off. The insult had annoyed her particularly because it was anonymous. If people took the liberty of saying such things, they should at least sign their name, so that you could prosecute them or defend yourself. Perhaps some of these envelopes too contained ungracious attacks. She was in no hurry to find out.

When she called on Mary that afternoon, she took the letters along, but she wasn't interested in them. She had come out of unegotistic friendship. When Mary offered her a cigarette, she accepted it.

"I might as well smoke," she said, "if you do."

What she really meant was that the slight effort at self-assertion involved in beginning a habit so disreputable as cigarette smoking made her conscious of boldness, and restored somewhat her self-respect. While she grasped the cigarette with unnecessary firmness Mary held the light.

"I thought you'd begin sooner or later. Don't blow out—inhale. There, you've put out the match."

Isabel drew a long cautious breath and started the flame.

"Now don't suck too hard on it—you'll make yourself choke. Breathe deep, once in a while, in between, to clear your lungs."

She lingered in front of Isabel until the operation was well launched and running smoothly.

"Did you bring any more letters?"

Isabel held out to her the little bundle.

"These came this morning—I haven't had time to look at them."

"You smoke and I'll read them to you. I hope there are some more exciting ones."

She seized her paper cutter, and opened the envelopes wholesale.

"I," said Isabel, "can do very well without the excitement." She was holding the cigarette at arm's length, trying to blow the smoke toward the ceiling. "I don't care now whether they praise me, and I dislike being criticized."

"Do you really? I'd stand any amount of criticism if I could get people stirred up. Ah, here you are!" She glanced a second at the first letter, and began in a gleeful tone:

Dear Nora Helmer: What you wrote in "The Atlantic Monthly" about the way men treat women is true. I have a husband and he means well, but he's just like that. I couldn't have put it into such fine words myself, but when I read what you wrote I said to myself, "That woman's been through it, all right!" I wouldn't for the world have my husband know that I'm writing this to you. He's a good man, but on most occasions he doesn't understand. Thank you, and please write some more. P. S. What I want to know is why you didn't say what we could do about it.

Isabel listened unmoved.

"I've had one or two of that kind before."

Mary was busy with the next letter. "My lord!"

"What now?"

"It's the first of its kind—a man—he signs it too—South Dakota."

"Well, go on and read—don't keep me waiting!"

Mary chuckled.

"I don't know that I ought to. It's extremely personal."

"Go on, for heaven's sake!"

Dear Miss or Madam: I have read what you say about the hard time you are having in "The Atlantic Monthly," and I like your spirit and want to say that I don't think you probably deserve what you got. Women do have a hard time of it unless they have the luck to have the right man. It's what kind of man they get that settles whether they will be happy or not. I am a farmer out here, middling prosperous, and forty-two, but young for my years. Until now I never thought of marrying, not because I didn't know a woman might be handy, but I never happened to meet one with much spirit. Out here they're dumb. When I read what you said about being sincere I thought here's a woman who'd like a home if she wasn't too tied down to it. And how do I know whether she's married or not? Perhaps if I told her I'd be willing to consider offering her half my home and as much freedom as I have myself, considering how much work there is to do around the place, perhaps she would be glad to hear from me, so I make bold to write you in that spirit and hope you will reply favorably in the same.

Isabel laughed.

"Poor fellow. It's an honest letter, anyway. I wish I had a style as genuine-sounding."

"Yes, it's the chance you perhaps ought not to neglect. . . . Here's a different one—it's typewritten. My! And he's educated, too."

My dear Madam: It is a great liberty I take in addressing you. I know, of course, that the name under which you write is borrowed from Ibsen. To reply to what I wish to say would disclose your identity. If you prefer to remain anonymous, therefore, please put this letter in your waste-basket and forgive me.

But what you say in your last paragraph about the narrowing influence of a happy home on the men of our country is the truest word, so far as I know, written by a woman in our time. I single out this small part of your essay because I find it applicable to myself. Since you have said so much in splendid praise of sincerity, I count on you to understand what I now say to you, not as a man addressing a woman, but as one human being reaching out to another for aid. I believe that you, with your profound intuitions of what is wrong in society to-day, are perhaps the one person who might help me.

To put my case in a few words, let me say that I am married, devoted to my wife, who loves me with all her heart. I have had the great fortune to know intimately in my own home now, and through childhood and youth, only noble and admirable women, but I confess that in recent years, especially since my marriage, I have felt myself stifled and thwarted, not in any one respect which I could name, but in my general outlook on life. Though entirely happy, I am growing narrower. I believe as you say that it is the happiness which indirectly produces the narrowness.

Are you understanding enough and generous enough to believe me when I say that my present desire to meet you is purely impersonal? I should like to ask you, face to face, one or two questions about myself. Am I correct in assuming that you reside in Boston? Certain phrases in your article caused me to think so. If I am right, will you do me the honor to lunch with me a week from this coming Thursday at the Copley-Plaza, at one o'clock? My affairs cause me to be in Boston on that day. I shall stand near the entrance of the dining-room. You will recognize me, perhaps, by the fact that I am of medium size, with a mustache, and dark hair, and shall be wearing a brown suit and a green tie.

If I hear nothing from you, I shall hope you will do me this great kindness. If the proposal seems to you preposterous, will you write on the enclosed post-card the one word "Impossible?"

For reasons which you perhaps will understand, the name on the post-card is not my own, but your message will reach me.

Mary looked up.

Isabel's eyes, large and bright, were fastened on her.

"You didn't expect results from that end of the essay, did you?"

Isabel shook her head. Mary fingered the letter a second.

"Do you know what I wish you'd do? Accept his invitation and go."

Isabel leaned over to the ash-tray and put out her cigarette.

"I'll confess something to you, Mary—I wish I could."

"Of course you do—I'm glad you owned up. He sounds interesting. I can foresee the fruitful episode, from end to end. He'd begin talking about his wife, whom he no longer loves. That's what he means when he says he has an entirely happy home, *but*—— You would give him good advice and comfort him, and he would take it to heart, thank you, and fall dead in love with you. Then the mother instinct in you would be so strong you couldn't cast him off—besides you're a novelist, and it would make wonderful material. Isabel, you'll have to go."

Isabel was mildly amused.

"You know it never would come to anything so tragic as that."

"If it wouldn't, then I shouldn't be interested. I'll confess something, too: I wish I were in your place! When I told you you ought to go, I meant I'd love an adventure of that sort. God! What a relief from Fairfax! Frankly, Isabel, it would be marvelous to come to grief in a good cause. Own up, you feel the same way!"

Was it banter, or was she telling truth under the light tone? Isabel looked at her steadily.

"I'm trying to be sincere nowadays. I don't believe it would be marvelous to come to grief, as you call it, but I'd be glad to get away from the doldrums of this town, and really live. Yes—I wish I could go to Boston."

"Then go, for heaven's sake!"

Mary held the letter and the post-card in her hand, and the two women still looked at each other.

"No, I meant I'd like to, but I haven't the courage—not yet."

"With time, then."

Mary was handing her the letter, when suddenly she stopped.

"How odd! It's from Fairfax!"

"What is?"

"The address is a letter box in Fairfax."

Isabel glanced at it, and gasped.

"Winthrop!"

Mary looked at her, frightened.

"What's wrong with him?"

"He wrote it!"

"No!"

"He wants to meet me! He doesn't love me."

She jumped to her feet, and Mary rose and stood facing her.

"It's the number of the box he has for his—his business letters!"

Mary put her arms around her, and tried to give an affectionate hug, but Isabel did not respond.

"I beg your pardon, Isabel, for—for knowing. I wouldn't for the world have read that letter."

Isabel turned and seated herself quietly again on the couch.

"It's not your fault, but since you do know, you'll have to see me through, somehow. . . . I never thought Winthrop would deceive me."

III

An hour later Mary had brought back something of Isabel's accustomed cheerfulness, and Isabel had worked herself into the mood to think the letter was less dangerous than it had at first appeared.

"You know what I'd like to do, Mary? I'd like to go to Boston with him. Of course he'd be horribly embarrassed, but he couldn't refuse. I'd know he was on pins and needles all the way. Then on Thursday I'd tell him I wanted to shop all day and couldn't lunch with him, but precisely at one I'd walk into the Copley-Plaza. Isn't that a situation for you? I'd ask him if he was waiting for anybody, and when he said he was—of course he'd pretend it was a business engagement—then I'd offer to wait with him until his friend came. Wouldn't that serve him right?"

The gaiety of her tone was forced, pathetically courageous. Mary, sitting back in the chair, watched her with half-closed eyes.

"I stick to what I told you, Isabel—take that letter to Winthrop this afternoon at his office. Don't lose a moment. Or if you can't talk to him there, give it back to him as soon as he comes home to-night. Tell him the whole truth, have a good laugh about it, and wipe the slate clean."

Isabel's fingers played nervously with the letter.

"And I tell you again, Mary, I can't do that. He'd ask why I wasn't frank with him from the first, and I

should have no answer. I really have none. And then I fibbed to him a little bit about it, and then——"

She was on the verge of tears. Mary waited till she was ready to go on.

"The worst is, perhaps I couldn't convince him that I still love him, that I'm as loyal as he thought. After we come to an explanation, he'll pretend to understand, but he'll believe me discontented."

Mary watched her with that same knotting of the eyebrows. What Isabel feared, she suspected, was a sudden revelation of the failure not of her love but of Winthrop's.

"I've always thought, Isabel, that if men and women—I'm speaking of the very best ones—can no longer care for each other as once they did—I mean really can't—and through no fault of theirs—perhaps it would be better if they let each other know and became true friends instead of make-believe lovers."

Isabel chose her words, for self-protection, Mary thought, rather than for precision.

"I—don't—think—Winthrop's case and mine—is exactly like that. That would be—tragedy."

"Well, then, follow the comic plan you suggested—go down to Boston and tease him."

Isabel shook her head. "I can't."

"Why not?"

"I don't know.—Well, I *do* know—if I made a joke of it, and his friend didn't appear after all, and we came away, then the memory of it would rankle. We'd get no further toward an understanding. I'd never forget he had hoped to meet somebody else."

"But after you teased him long enough, you could pull

out the letter with a dramatic flourish, and accept his invitation for lunch and a quiet talk."

"Well, that's worse than confessing the whole thing now! After that, how could we ever be at ease again? He'd swear he meant nothing—that the letter was a temporary aberration, or something of the kind—and I should know better."

Mary nodded.

"Yes, I see that. And you too would say you didn't mean what you wrote in the essay, and he wouldn't believe you, either."

Isabel resented the parallel.

"I'd never tell him I didn't mean what I wrote."

Mary raised her eyebrows.

"Well, that's hardly reason enough for not going to Boston."

Isabel looked up, on her guard, then smiled a bit sadly.

"Mary, it's diabolical the way you make me search myself out. Yes, there's another reason. If I went to the Copley-Plaza, and surprised him at the door, and asked if he was waiting for anybody, perhaps he wouldn't say yes—perhaps he'd say no. If I caught Winthrop in a lie I—I couldn't survive it."

"Well then, I'd advise my other plan. Write 'Impossible' on the post-card—you'd better let me write it for you, or print it, so he won't recognize your hand. Then forget the whole thing. When the anonymous author turns him down, he'll relapse into domestic endurance."

She thought a moment.

"I can't, Mary. I can't leave the tangle unsolved. Whenever I spoke to him, whenever he said the most casual thing to me, I'd feel we were living a falsehood. I've got to know what's on his mind, what he would say to me now if I weren't his wife. You see? The fact that I'm his wife is making us strangers."

Mary's patience was wearing out. Her interest had gone some moments before.

"I've come to the end of my advice," she said. "You're not content to do nothing, but there's nothing you will do."

Isabel studied the rug on the floor. Of the two choices, she knew in her heart the less terrible would be to call Winthrop to an accounting. Just as she had been glad, in spite of embarrassment, when she saw him reading her sincere thoughts, so in this new complication she had a sense of progress toward something vital, toward excitement if not toward liberty. She couldn't bring herself to confide altogether in Mary, but the one course impossible for her now was to continue with Winthrop in the relation they had been, as she now realized, putting up with. She had pretended to be a docile wife; now she could no longer pretend. He too, had been acting a part, had played the contented husband, had even assumed a dislike he hadn't felt for her pages in *The Atlantic*. From now on she would see beneath that mask, and despise him for the deceit.

"Mary, what the next step is, I don't know, but I'm sure of one thing—at any price I must find out what Winthrop would say if—if the author really had lunch with him. I mean Nora, not me."

For an instant the boredom on Mary's face lifted.

"I've a scream of a plan! I'll go for you, pretend to be Nora, and tell you what's on his mind."

She had spoken with the utmost impulsiveness, and at once was sorry. Even if her own reticence had not set her right, the horror on Isabel's face would have taught her how great a mistake she had made.

"You would listen to my husband explain why he doesn't love me?"

If Mary could have fallen on her knees before her friend, the gesture would not have expressed adequately her wish for pardon.

"I don't know why I said it, Isabel—of course it would be horrible—nothing in the world could induce me to do it. We've thrashed the matter back and forth so long, and thought of so many plans, I suppose I didn't realize what I was saying. Believe I'm ashamed —do forgive me!"

Isabel tried to be generous, but the effort showed.

"Of course you didn't mean it," she said. "I knew it was a thoughtless remark."

"Not altogether thoughtless, perhaps, but unlucky and impossible. You wanted help and I was trying to supply it. Really, there's nothing to do but forget, if we both can. I'll always be sorry I blurted out that crazy idea."

Isabel reached for the package of cigarettes on the table.

"I'll smoke another if you don't mind—I understand it's good for the nerves."

Mary lighted the match for her, as before, and began smoking herself. For several minutes neither spoke.

"Mary, that plan of yours isn't so outrageous."

"Oh, yes, it is."

"No, you could do as you said, and since Winthrop knows you and I are friends, he isn't likely to say what would embarrass you to hear. If what he does confess to you would be useful for me to know, you can pass it on; that would be a true service. It may be that the impulse to write the letter came from nothing of consequence. To assure me of that, would be a still kinder act of friendship."

Mary followed her with breathless interest, but at the end shook her head.

"Isabel, I have such curiosity about life that if he belonged to any woman but you, I don't believe I'd hesitate. I could go into the adventure as though it were a sort of lark. But after reading his letter and sharing your confidence, I just can't. It would be indecent, spiritually."

Isabel leaned forward toward her.

"If it were so critical, I shouldn't ask you. I *want* you to go into it as a sort of lark. Do the teasing I thought of doing. If the right moment comes, tell him the truth, that I wrote the essay and that we had this conversation. If you do this for me, he may be reticent and embarrassed with you, but when he and I meet, we shall be able to talk frankly."

Mary thought a moment.

"It's too dangerous. I've an idea it might come out wrong."

Isabel's face grew firm.

"After all, it's your fault, Mary. You haven't the right to leave me in the lurch. If you hadn't urged it, I should never have published the essay."

'I like that! I urged you to sign your name to it—that's all I urged. You treated my advice then exactly as you treat it now. No matter how many plans I might suggest to meet your latest difficulty, you'd take none of them. You can't blame me for the advice you don't follow."

Isabel abandoned at once the argumentative attitude, and threw herself on her friend's mercy.

"You don't know how wretched I am—you couldn't know unless you had a husband like Winthrop, and had just read a letter like that! You are able to help me—no one else. How can you refuse? If you do, you'll never think well of yourself again. What if it is embarrassing for you? I don't care—I'm desperate. If you won't go, the result sooner or later will be that Winthrop and I shall lose each other. I tell you now what I'll say then. You're to blame!"

Mary hesitated.

"You may be expressing your true feelings now, but before I was half-way to Boston you might change your mind and hate me for going. There's no need for you to lose your husband; you can either talk it out with him, or bear the trouble in silence. But our friendship wouldn't outlive the experiment you think you want—and it's too precious to spoil."

Isabel's eyes flashed.

"You'll do what I ask you—I know you will. You're too generous not to, but if you won't, our friendship ends here."

Mary returned her glance, pride for pride.

"I'm sorry, but—then it ends here."

Isabel rose slowly and without another word crossed

the threshold and went down the stairs. She went as though expecting every second to be called back, but the other woman stood motionless in the middle of the room and let her go.

That night when Mary undid the couch and lay down for what she hoped would be rest, she found herself tossing with troubled speculations as to what would happen if she really did go to Boston. Her acquaintance with Winthrop was slight—only casual meetings at Isabel's dinner table or over a game of bridge. His letter had revealed more of him than she had taken the pains to guess at, yet now she found it embarrassingly easy to imagine what he would say and what she would reply. For the first time in her life she knew that she could be, if occasion served, what men call an understanding woman. Her fate had withheld from her until then the knowledge of her talent for sympathy. On the whole she had been lonely and her experience limited, except for this one bright episode of Isabel's friendship. Less than most women of her time, perhaps, had she wasted thought on social problems of any kind. Until Isabel read the essay to her—indeed, during the reading—she had been inclined to put aside problems of husband and wife, as miseries which fortunately did not concern her. She would have been glad to marry, if the right man had appeared, but he hadn't, and she had spared herself any regret over his absence, perhaps because she entertained a subconscious faith that sooner or later he would come. But now she knew she could talk to Winthrop as a true woman should—by which she meant that she could talk with him as Isabel could not.

She realized too that what she had discovered of

Isabel's nature in their talks about Winthrop had put an end to her hero worship. Her friend might write well, but in the crises of life she was only an ordinary woman. It hurt Mary a little to feel this admiration fade from her heart. Her temperament was of that generosity which must have some one to idealize, and it had been pleasanter to believe than to doubt that Isabel was as wise as her books. Neither the books nor the author, she saw now, had ever made any great disclosure of wisdom. She wondered how she could continue in the old relation, or whether Isabel would notice and resent the change.

After all, if Isabel understood it, she ought to be encouraged rather than offended by Winthrop's letter. The man had something in him. In the essay she had complained that life was too narrow, that she was surrounded by people who had ceased to grow. Well, here was Winthrop reaching out for any one who would grow with him. How easy, if Isabel only had the sense, to meet him at the Copley-Plaza, tease and torment him, lay the punishment on thick and then make a comrade of him for life by proposing that since they both had the same idea at the same time, they should rise together to richer experiences. How easy if Isabel were only that kind of wife! But she wasn't.

Since Isabel could do nothing to prevent their drifting apart, they would surely drift, and it wouldn't be pleasant to watch. Mary asked herself whether she ought to remain in Fairfax, now that her reason for being there at all was suddenly destroyed. And if she moved, what kind of friends could she hope for? She wondered how many homes were like this into which she had suddenly looked. If married people were normally out

of tune, once you knew them, must she seek companionship and inspiration only among the single? Toward morning, as these thoughts repeated themselves, she became quite pessimistic.

One thing she was sure of—Isabel wouldn't leave her in peace, though their parting had been strained. Winthrop would never hear of his letter, but she might as well be prepared for daily visits, daily interruptions, tireless questions, for which no answer was wanted. Isabel was really very selfish. The shortest way out would be to stop her, next time she broached the subject, to call a halt even though the friendship might break. Of course if an occasion should ever arise to talk with Winthrop as one friend to another—— Impossible at Boston, but why not some day, by accident, in Fairfax?

She was not altogether surprised, therefore, when Isabel returned the next morning, but she was startled at the suffering and the fear in her friend's face.

"Good heavens, Isabel, if you take it so hard, Winthrop will notice!"

"He does. He asked me at breakfast what was the matter."

"And you told him, I hope?"

"No."

"For heaven's sake, why not?"

"Mary, don't argue with me. I shall lose my mind over this. You must go to Boston and explain everything!"

"That's worse than what you wanted yesterday. Then I was to use my judgment whether he ought to get the shock; now you're asking me in any circumstances to inflict it on him."

Isabel threw herself on the couch. Mary stood facing her.

"We stayed home last evening, you know, and I don't believe he was ever nicer. Really, he seemed miraculously thoughtful, asked about what I had done during the day, showed ever so kind an interest—and I knew all the time he was a hypocrite."

"No, you didn't. He probably meant every word. In the letter he said he loved his wife. His only complaint was that his life is a little narrow, and perhaps he's determined to broaden you out. If I went to Boston, that's the advice I'd give him. I'd say you wouldn't be a bad woman if he could educate you."

Isabel refused to smile.

"I came to ask you—to beg you—to go. Don't shake your head! I've never asked any one to do so much for me as you can do if you will. I can't spend another evening like that and stay sane. And the solution is out of my hands now. It's too late."

Mary looked at her steadily.

"I didn't sleep much myself last night, thinking of you and him, and since I rather thought you might bring the subject up again, I decided just how far I could do as you wish. I didn't really make up my mind till breakfast time, and still I'm not sure I'm right, but if you insist, I'll go to Boston on these conditions—that I may tell him as little or as much of the truth as I think best. Perhaps I shall be not quite honest with him; that is, if it seems preferable. I'll let him think I wrote the essay. In that case you must promise never to give me away."

Isabel listened eagerly.

"I promise."

"On the other hand, if there is anything fundamentally wrong, Isabel, I'd like to deal with it, for your sake and his, as wisely as I can. It may be that I'll ask him to come right back to your house and thrash it out with you in my presence. You must promise to be a sport."

Isabel looked slightly disapproving.

"If it comes to that, he and I might as well discuss it alone."

Mary threw up both hands in disgust.

"For God's sake, Isabel, then discuss it with him alone! That's what I told you to do in the first place."

She went over to the window and pretended to be busy picking dead leaves off the geranium plant. Isabel waited for her to turn around, but Mary refused to look at her again.

"Very well, Mary, I'll be grateful to you if you'll go, on any conditions whatever."

Mary came to her and took her hands, not in a gesture of spontaneous friendship, but as though she were detaining her from doing something disagreeable.

"Isabel, since I have seen so much of his soul and of yours, you may as well have a glimpse of mine. Queer as it may seem to you, I couldn't bring myself to do this until I was quite sure of my motives. You see, you've got me interested, like yourself, in being sincere. Do you know why I am willing to meet Winthrop?"

"Why, Mary dear, I suppose it is out of friendship for me. I could have no other grounds for appealing to you."

"You may hate me, Isabel, but I'll tell you the truth. That isn't the reason at all. I'm going to Boston because I think it may turn out quite exciting."

Isabel drew her hand back. Mary laughed.

"I thought you wouldn't like the logic to come true on your hands so quickly. Here I was worrying all night about your troubles, and only this morning, over a cup of coffee and an egg I had boiled too hard, I saw at last the comedy as it is. You wrote that life, for women in towns like ours, should be brightened up. Sorry as I am that you're unhappy, you've given me more to think of than I've had for a long time. Now I'll go to Boston and play this part with your husband, not because it's wise but because it probably isn't, and not because it will help you, but because it will undoubtedly be the most interesting adventure I ever went into. There's the sincerity you've been asking for!"

Isabel smiled a little feebly on one side of her mouth.

"I never heard you talk this way before. You're facetious, of course."

"Isabel, I'm telling you the truth, as perhaps you've never heard it, not from a woman anyway. Knowing this, if you now prefer I shouldn't go, I'll be more than content to remain away."

Isabel studied her face for some clue to the thoughts behind her words. Mary stared back, as emotionless as a mask.

"I still wish you to go. As I said before, on your own conditions."

Mary leaned over and kissed her.

"Dear Isabel, I portrayed myself in extreme terms only to find out how much you really needed me. The moment he and I meet, of course I'll tell him the truth. Nothing else will save you two. I'll speak, since you can not."

IV

At ten minutes to one Winthrop walked into the Copley-Plaza, a little early, not because he was eager for the interview, but because on the contrary he was driving himself to it. Almost since the moment when he had mailed his letter, he was sorry he had written, sorry he hadn't received the post-card marked "Impossible." Never had Isabel seemed to him more sympathetic than during those days, never more keenly aware of him, never more alert, more responsive. He was deeply ashamed of himself to have confessed to a total stranger that he was unhappy in his marriage. It wasn't the essay, after all, which had stirred him up—it was that confounded *Doll's House*. Many men were far worse off than he, yet put up with it cheerfully. Some of them, he knew, finding their lives a little drab, consoled themselves as they went along with shabby adventures. That wasn't in his code. But then it wasn't in theirs to write out their complaints and mail them to anonymous authors. Why hadn't he paid more attention to Isabel's good points, been proud of her achievements in literature, taken himself less seriously? Now, hang it, he had let himself in for a private consultation with a strange woman who might or might not be discreet. Some old maid, perhaps, who would gloat over his life story—that is, if he were fool enough to pour out any more of it. Of course he might stay away and let her cool her heels in the lobby till she got tired. But that expedient too was not in his code. Con-

found it, if she wanted to, she could trace him by the post box number.

He walked through the corridor, then down the side hall to the entrance of the dining-room. The head waiter urged him to enter, and suggested a small table along the windows, on the side toward Copley Square. Winthrop shook his head.

"There'll be two of us in a minute."

The head waiter indicated pleasure at the news, and left him alone.

The only honorable course would be to tell the woman promptly that his letter had been the result of an emotional earthquake, an involuntary tribute to her eloquence, but otherwise not significant. It wouldn't do, perhaps, to say—or perhaps a literary female would be flattered—that her brilliant essay had created rather than solved a problem—that until he read it he hadn't realized how discontented with Isabel he was. No, he'd leave that idea alone; it would get him beyond his depth. Best merely to repeat that the essay had profoundly moved him, and that he was looking for light on the problem as it affected not the American husband alone, but husbands and wives together. Especially in small towns. Yes, that would be a good line.

And he hoped to God no one in the restaurant would recognize him. Some excuse he could make to the woman for not telling his name, but if a friend should chance along and then speak of it to Isabel—that peril occurred to him now for the first time. With a quite immoral pang of envy he wondered how they managed, those friends of his who had innumerable flirtations on the side, yet kept the news to themselves.

He glanced into the dining-room, the pale-green oval, to reassure himself. If some one who knew him *should* be there, better to be seen first without a companion. No—no one he recognized—but for all that, they might recognize him. Confound it!

It was six minutes past one. He'd wait four more. That was an idea—perhaps she wasn't coming! Why take it for granted she had received the letter? She might be away from home—abroad—perhaps she didn't live in Boston! Fate might save him after all.

But this prospect of salvation brought a slight twinge of disappointment, of which he would have preferred to take no notice. Having keyed himself up to a crisis, he could get no complete satisfaction from an easy escape. Too much of a let-down. Like being reprieved as the firing squad raise their rifles.

If any of his friends should be in that oval room, and see him with the woman, how doubly awkward if she turned out to be good-looking! Well, there was no great likelihood. It was a principle of nature that women writers should be homely. Dabblers like Isabel could still be presentable, of course, but not the real ones. But if this woman should prove the exception——

Mary Allerton was coming down the narrow hall. He knew her at once and turned panicky. Just what he had feared! The one woman in the world who was sure to tell Isabel. Not a chance of escape! He tried to be innocent and easy, and met her half-way, with outstretched hand.

"Why, this is delightful, Miss Allerton. What luck brings you here?"

She was holding toward him a sheet of paper.

"Your letter to me."

What he said then, nor how they found their way to the quiet corner of the dining-room, he could not have recalled. He suspected that the head waiter transported them to the table without asking their consent. Another voice than his, he would have sworn, was ordering *hors d'œuvres,* and a curry, and large cups of coffee. He was conscious that the waiter was leaving them, and he wished the man would stay. Across the table Mary Allerton's reddish hair showed over her forehead, just under her tight-fitting hat, and her large brown eyes were fixed on him. He cleared his throat.

"You must be amazed, Miss Allerton, to see who wrote that letter, and I don't need to say I'm surprised too. I never should have connected you with that essay. Perhaps I ought to have guessed, but in such matters I'm ignorant. It never occurred to me."

He paused.

"I suppose you were surprised, weren't you?"

"Not altogether."

His voice trembled a little.

"Did you—had you noticed that Isabel and I weren't entirely——"

"Your letter told more than I had suspected."

"I wish I hadn't written it."

She was still watching him with that fixed gaze.

"Mr. Beauvel, if you'd rather not talk, now that you know who I am, let's forget the letter. You can understand that as Isabel's friend I am embarrassed."

His face brightened.

"You know, I'm not so keen as I was to discuss my troubles. I realize now that I wasn't behaving in the best form, but I shan't regret writing, since the letter gives

me occasion to know there is one woman in the world who sees clearly into the perennial domestic problem, and who recognizes a sincere appeal for aid. How you accumulated such wisdom puzzles me, since you're not——"

"Not married?"

"That wasn't very adroit. I meant——"

"You meant the obvious. I'm unmarried, and therefore I don't know much about life."

"Well, you never could have written that essay if you didn't."

His tone was warm with admiration. She couldn't be a day older than Isabel—not so old.

"Do you know what I liked best about it? It was the reach of idealism—the dream you kept suggesting throughout, the dream of a happy partnership. I like people who have faith. My one mistake was, I thought you rather unhappy—the author, I mean. Now I must say it's a miracle, how a cheerful girl like you can think yourself into the grievances of other people."

The brown eyes softened, in a friendlier mood.

"Mr. Beauvel, I can't let you go on. I too came here to confess something. The praise you have given me is—well, I don't deserve it at all."

He found himself charmed by the intimate appeal in her voice—it was almost a caress. Just then the waiter—confound him!—appeared with the *hors d'œuvres*. The man took an abominably long time spooning out the cold things from their dishes. The silence as they watched was really too oppressive. Yet after all, one might as well talk before him as before any other piece of furniture.

"Not more than you deserve, Miss Allerton. I'm

no hand at criticizing literature, but as I said in my letter, I can certify that you know something of a man's mind."

The waiter departed again, and Mary Allerton was occupied with the food. Winthrop continued eagerly.

"And if I were writing the letter now, I should add what I think is higher praise. I believe you are what I never met before, a woman absolutely square; you know, in the man's sense."

When the brown eyes looked up at him, he wondered why they seemed troubled.

"I mean," he went on, "you did answer that letter of mine, in the first place. You could read between the lines, that the man who wrote it was genuine, or you wouldn't have run the risk of coming. In women that sort of intelligence is rare. It's not their fault, of course, but life trains them to be on their guard against even the best of my sex, and as a result they sometimes do cruel injustice to the fellow-being who needs their aid, and in good faith asks for it. Much as I love Isabel, I couldn't say so much for her. You know what I mean, she's very feminine. And when you found out who I was, you offered to withdraw at once. It was very fine of you."

His praise embarrassed her, he could see that, but he took it as evidence of delicacy. Since she was his wife's friend, the slightest compliment from him would imply a reflection upon Isabel.

"I find it hard to explain," she said, "but I must. I don't want your approval; I'm utterly unworthy. Nothing could be more false than the position your words put me in."

Each new outbreak of modesty pleased him more.

"I've changed my mind," he said. "I thought we couldn't speak of the subject which brought us together, but now it seems a mistake—one we might regret all our lives—not to speak of it. When I read your article, I wanted help to live on with Isabel, or perhaps I hoped for a way out of that life. In these days between, I have been sorry I wrote. You know how a mood passes, and Isabel and I are happy enough, as things go. Then when I saw who had written the essay, I confess I was horrified—lost hope for a surreptitious consultation, saw myself ruined—saw you and Isabel talking it over, with her feelings wounded, and you perhaps thinking me not a very decent husband. But the way you've taken the surprise, your frankness and what I call your good sportsmanship, makes me change my mind. Now if you'll be patient with me, I'd like to be absolutely sincere. May I ask you some questions about Isabel and myself?"

He had spoken with some feeling. Surely she couldn't have mistaken his earnestness, but she looked frightened.

"After all, you know," he continued, "it's what you very kindly came here to talk about, if I had been some other man. You *are* a good sport, aren't you? You won't go back on me now!"

She sat up very straight.

"I'm sure of only one thing—I ought not to have come. If I obey my conscience at this moment, I shan't listen to a word about Isabel."

He fought back against her reluctance, in a tone as clear-cut as her own.

"This is no ordinary encounter," he said, "and it's vain to suppose it will have no consequences. Suppose you won't let me talk with you, do you think your friend-

ship with Isabel can still go on unaltered? What would she think if she found out by chance that you and I were here to-day, if not actually talking about my unhappiness with her, at least with the intention of doing so? Suppose she learns some time that you wrote that essay? So far, she hasn't the slightest suspicion, but the secret may leak out at any moment, wouldn't you say? And what if she knew I wrote that letter to you? Mary, you've got to go through with it and help me. There'll be no greater risks, but much more to gain, than if at this point we lost our courage."

She noticed that he had called her by her first name. He hadn't done so deliberately, but he caught the response in her eyes as he said the word. He was right, she didn't mind. On the contrary, she became more cordial.

They had forgotten their meal, and the impatient waiter tried to bring them back to earth with a curry. Winthrop resented the interruption, but if he interpreted correctly her sensitive face, Mary welcomed the respite. He knew she would say nothing more until the waiter had disappeared to a safe distance.

"Since you set the example," she began, "I'll speak plainly too. I don't mind confessing that your letter, and what I afterward thought about it, revealed to me possibilities of frankness in my own nature which I had never suspected. If you wish, let's talk about Isabel. But only on condition that you don't ask for more wisdom than I have. I know little about a special problem like yours—only a few principles of life which so far as I can see ought to work here as elsewhere. For example, you wish to talk it out with me; but why don't you talk it out with Isabel? Why must one solve a problem so

indirectly? Go tell her that you read my essay, that the last paragraphs of it touched your own case, tell her you're not happy, tell her whatever you feel obliged to say. She's an intelligent woman, Winthrop. Treat her like one!"

It was his turn to take satisfaction in the sound of his name.

"I can't, Mary, and for two good reasons. The first is that when we talked about your essay, I was fighting off some thoughts which it had already suggested to me. You had written truths which I was trying not to admit, so I said your ideas were nonsense, and only a senseless woman—one of these modern, restless freaks—could have entertained them."

"Did Isabel agree?"

"She did not! Naturally not! She's too good a judge of literature. But it was a sort of fib between us from the start, and I can't let her know now that I was making-believe, was hiding something. That kind of distrust can't be mended, I fancy, not after she knows of it. I should have spoken my thoughts right out, the moment I read the article. Or perhaps, now I think of it, I hadn't so much to speak of then—I was just beginning to realize how far apart she and I were, and you drove the truth into me. It's too late now."

While he was speaking, she had busied herself with the curry, but he had the feeling that she was making an excuse to avoid his gaze. He waited now until she looked up.

"I've heard that sort of reasoning before," she said. "By gradual stages you've got yourself into a position you think it would be hard to move out of."

"That's it."

"What's your second reason for not speaking to her?"

This time it was he who avoided her eyes. He was so long in answering, she thought he had not heard the question.

"The reason I can't speak to Isabel now," he said, "is that I've talked with you."

She raised her brows.

"I've met you, Mary—that's the trouble."

Again she looked frightened. He watched her lift a glass of water to her lips.

"I thought you had met me several times before."

"Not till now—not you, as you really are. Please don't—I'm not saying that I've fallen in love with you, or anything of that sort."

She burst into a laugh, as it seemed to him, unnecessarily.

"I should hope not."

"I mean, you've given me an idea, just a little glimpse, of sound friendship between a man and a woman, a perfectly honest facing of truth together. As I sit here, I know you might talk to me about the sort of problem I find difficult, or you might refuse to talk to me because of your love for Isabel, but in no case would you pretend, or resort to subterfuge, or deceive me. What I think of you this minute—well, it's about like this; much as I have loved Isabel, I've never been able to speak plainly to her, without reserve, not on any subject. From what I've confessed, you know it is as much my fault as hers, probably more so, but there we are, fond of each other, and I, at least, acting a part. With you, just for this one hour, I have been honest toward myself, and honest to-

ward you. I didn't know it was possible with any woman. What you may think of me afterward, or what you may do, I don't care. Now, at least, you are dealing with me fairly. I shall always thank you for it."

More than impressed with his own emotion, he took advantage of her silence to ask himself whether or not he was falling in love with the woman. He had embarrassed her, that was clear. She wasn't looking up at him now. But he was glad he had said what he felt. No, he was not in love with her. He was still in possession of all his faculties. Really, she was not particularly beautiful, not nearly so attractive as Isabel still was, even after several years of marriage. He found himself grateful to his fate that only his intelligence had been touched, not his heart. On the other hand, merely to have said what he felt made him more sharply conscious of his own point of view. With Isabel he had never been able to talk frankly. Living with her alone, and lacking such a companionship as he had found at this lunch table, he had not seen himself as he was. Obviously this encounter with Mary was the sort of adventure one must get out of with prudence, but never would he regret getting into it.

She looked up at him.

"How much I appreciate what you say, Winthrop, I couldn't easily express. A woman in my position, unmated, is sometimes lonely. I've had only my writing for companion until I met your wife, and I dare say the confidences of women must always be different from the exchange of ideas possible in rare conditions between a woman and a man. This noon I've had satisfaction such as I may never enjoy again, from the fact that we have

talked plainly, without the circumlocutions usual between your sex and mine, and the best way I can show my gratitude is by repeating the advice you rejected. I still think you ought to go straight to Isabel, and save all that you can out of your damaged happiness. If you don't love her now with the fervor with which you began, perhaps that's natural—nothing to complain of. Can't you substitute another kind of affection—substitute it by your will-power, since it no longer comes by a rush of instinct? I am convinced that Isabel will meet you more than halfway, and instead of criticizing you for being less than frank, she may perhaps be glad to know of your fibs, as you call them. They will make it easier if she has something on her own conscience to confess.

"But if you can't do this, then I've one more bit of advice to offer—drop the whole matter, forget it as far as you can, and let us, you and me, forget it too. We'll remember this meeting as not altogether unpleasant, a beginning, I hope, of a genuine friendship. If you don't care to tell Isabel I was here, you need not. What you have said about her to me, is discreditable to neither of you. Some problems, I am sure, ought never be solved; the best way is to pass them by."

He wasn't convinced. Not that he could see a flaw in the argument, but he knew his trouble was less superficial than she implied. Or perhaps he hated to admit that his problem *was* superficial, that he had made such a bother about something normal, something to be expected.

"I suppose you are right," he said, "and thanks for the time you have given me, and for the wisdom you were generous enough to share."

"Don't say that!"

"Of course I'll say it. At the moment I don't see how I can forget the problems. I'm not a very good actor."

"Who is? From what you tell of your conversations with Isabel over the article, I'd say you are far from a bad actor. It will come easier when you try it for a purpose in which your conscience is clear."

It annoyed him that her tone should suddenly turn moralistic, should end their talk with the suggestion of reproof.

"All right," he said, resigned. "I'll go back and see what I can do."

"But you know," said Mary, "you haven't told me where the difficulty lies, why it isn't easy to share your intellectual and spiritual life with Isabel."

He was amazed.

"I started to tell you, and you wouldn't hear it!"

She flushed slightly.

"Of course I mean in a general way. I couldn't listen to what's too personal."

"It's simple enough. I wrote you in the letter, I'm one of those men whose lives are made narrow, as it seems to me, by the goodness of their wives, their respectability, everything that's admirable about them. Your essay put it perfectly; there's nothing to add. What Isabel likes in me are the few qualities which correspond exactly with qualities in herself. We confine ourselves to these common interests. But of course there are sides in my nature which match nothing in hers. If I try to develop them, she fears I'll drift away. To keep her contented, I must let part of myself die."

Mary smiled.

"And of course she too has interests which do not correspond with yours, and which for your sake she suppresses."

"I don't know that she has.—Oh, of course, she must have, when you come to think of it."

"Really, it can't be so hopeless as you fear. Whatever you have in common is safe, and you both might permit each to develop an individuality on the fringe, as it were."

He saw they were going over the ground again, and getting nowhere.

"I'll do what you suggested, Mary. I'll try to forget it all and start fresh."

As he was helping her put on her coat, one last impulse of frankness seized him.

"It's a dreadful ignorance to admit," he said, "but I've never read your novels. The only thing of yours I know is that wonderful essay. Now that I've made the acquaintance of your real self, I'll read your other works."

She laughed.

"Don't bother! None of them will mean so much to you as the essay."

"Well, you *would* have to do pretty well, to beat that."

V

Though she knew how impatient Isabel would be, she did not go to her. Partly she feared she might meet Winthrop, if she went to his house, and he might suspect that the secret of their luncheon was not safe, and partly she was conscience-stricken when she reviewed her own conduct. Harmless as the Boston visit proved, she had failed to carry out her intention, she had not told Winthrop the truth, and now she could offer Isabel no honest and complete solution such as she had promised. A conviction pursued her, a suspicion ill-defined but most uncomfortable, that she had been faithless to her friend. She ought not to have enjoyed the luncheon so much.

For two days Isabel waited, then came to the little room and sat once more on the familiar couch.

"Have you nothing to tell me?"

Mary sat down beside her and took her hand.

"Isabel dear, really nothing. It's as I hoped from the first, your fears were quite unjustified. He's devoted to you, of course, only a little restless, as husbands become toward the end of the first five years."

"Oh, that's when they become restless, is it?"

She was hurt, or on the defensive. Mary knew that the old confidence between them had disappeared.

"I told him to go home and talk to you frankly, since there was nothing you two couldn't discuss, or else to forget the whole matter, and be happy in your love, and in his own love for you."

"Which is he going to do?"

"Why, he talked much as you did when I gave you the same advice. He was sure that neither course was possible, but when he left I had the impression that he would say nothing."

Isabel drew her hand away. The two women sat side by side without a word.

"Well, I'm deeply in your debt, Mary, for going. I rather expected you to come at once and tell me what had happened."

"I was coming as soon as I could. I'm sorry for the delay."

Isabel turned to look into her eyes.

"Did you tell him the truth—about the essay?"

"No. . . . I started to, but the waiter brought some food and interrupted, and the moment didn't return."

"Then he thinks you wrote it?"

"I'm afraid he does."

Isabel waited a moment, then stood up to go.

"Thank you again, Mary."

She held out her hand cordially enough, but Mary knew that Winthrop's wife was now her enemy.

She knew it still more clearly when Isabel asked her a few evenings later, to dine. The gage was fairly flung, and she could not afford not to take it up. A domestic meal for the three alone, Isabel said. No one else would be asked. Mary found herself by force of habit taking out her best gown. She put it away again, and went plainly dressed. She even took some pains to make her hair less soft and charming. Isabel would have no right not to trust her.

All three were extraordinarily gay. Winthrop came in with an exaggeration of boyish good humor, and

busied himself at once with more than the needed number of cocktails. As they all knew, Isabel had no taste for the drink, but that evening she refilled her glass. When they sat down they were showing a disposition to talk all at once. Winthrop found it necessary to explain how well Isabel had played a hand of bridge the night before. Isabel developed a pointed interest in Winthrop's latest business ventures, but disclosed such vagueness in the details that the subject promptly collapsed. Mary would have preferred to listen, but she seemed to be on Isabel's mind or Winthrop's, and unless she kept talking they plied her with questions. For the first time in their acquaintance Isabel was interested in Mary's work—in the novel she pretended to think Mary was meditating.

"I don't know that I'll write another, Isabel, until Winthrop reads my first one."

Isabel glanced at her quickly. Mary saw the error—she had called him by his first name. He assumed a jocular manner.

"When I've made my pile," he said, "I'll retire and cultivate my mind. The climax of my career will be making the acquaintance of the female geniuses of this country."

For a moment Isabel was off her guard.

"One by one, Winthrop? Or do you refer to their books?"

He laughed heartily.

"Only the books. The other way, I'd have no luck."

Isabel smiled graciously.

"Winthrop has become quite a reading man, Mary. Unfortunately his taste doesn't lie in novels. He's going in for drama."

Her husband looked up genuinely astonished.

"Drama? I don't know a thing about it."

"You will, Winthrop, in time. He's been studying Ibsen, Mary."

Mary wondered how far the woman would dare go. No doubt this tormenting was unpremeditated, but for that very reason it might prove more dangerous. If Isabel insisted on being disagreeable, the right reply might be to spring a bomb then and there—lay all the cards on the table and force these two reluctant people to a complete understanding. She was already framing the first sentence; the beginning, of course, would be the hard part. If only Celia weren't so assiduous in waiting on them. Perhaps after dinner, when they were alone——

But Isabel stopped her teasing, and Celia remained vigilant by the tableside, and when they went into the living room there was no good excuse for spoiling an evening which had begun to run more smoothly, if still under the shadow of constraint. For a moment Mary was startled to see *The Atlantic Monthly* still lying on the table, but when she went over to it in a spirit of bravado, it turned out to be a later number. She hoped Winthrop and Isabel hadn't observed her confusion.

At the end of the evening Isabel offered Winthrop as an escort home, and he said something about getting out the car, but she firmly declined. She had no wish to be left alone with him just then, and Isabel's courtesy had a strain of malice in it. She walked back to her room, lighted her lamp, and for long moments smoked a solitary cigarette, meditating the stage to which her life had reached. It occurred to her as somewhat odd that in spite of what she had first said to Isabel of her wish for adventure, this experience inspired in her no

impulse to write. A true novelist like Isabel would probably make capital of it, but she herself was primarily a woman. Perhaps all her supposed interest in literature had only been admiration of Isabel, or envy in disguise. What they had said to her at the table about her forthcoming novel had left her quite cold. If there was anything she really wanted at that moment it was life, not a career in art.

She found herself wondering what would be the most tactful way to leave Fairfax. She had not definitely decided to go, but every fine instinct resented the possibility of meeting Isabel and Winthrop again on any such terms as she had that evening suffered from. Not that she had really suffered. She was quite prepared to accept the whole episode as comedy; indeed, she wished she had some one with whom to laugh about it. Such a great stir over what was after all a trifle! Until Isabel and Winthrop had become interested in sincerity, she had taken it for granted that husbands and wives, like other human beings, told white lies, yet slept with an easy conscience, even concealed from each other secrets that might have hurt, even deceived each other outright, without ceasing to love. She had supposed so, yet here were these two average human beings wrecking their nervous systems over the fact that they wanted to be honest with each other, and there was nothing they ought not to be honest about, but they hadn't the nerve.

She was quite sure that whatever else the situation might mean, it held no literary inspiration, and it opened to her no satisfying door to a wider life. If she became more deeply entangled, her own soul would at last be not only straightened, but a little smirched. She must

go away. Probably to Europe, to the south of France, or to Italy, where American authors, less successful ones like herself, make limited means produce more comfort than at home. Under the spell of Isabel's personality, she had felt no need of travel, but she knew now why her writing had fallen off, why the novelist in her had faded; that evening had taught her she was running out of material. Thank heaven, she was still young enough to seek life, experience rich but sane. Very well, then, she'd go.

She found herself repeating this resolve so often that she began to suspect some faltering in her will. If she was to give up this little room, leave her friends and find a home in another part of the world, why not make the decision once for all, go to bed and sleep soundly? She could not altogether hide from herself a slight disappointment in Winthrop. Perhaps that was why she wanted now to see the world—not love of writing, but disgust with him. A really great man, she was sure, would never stand still and permit a situation to master him. If Isabel was on his nerves, why didn't he get up and leave her? It would be cruel, but it would indicate back-bone. There were no children to detain him. Isabel's selfishness in that respect had been clear enough. Or if he preferred to stay, why didn't he pound his fist and tell his wife exactly what he wanted at home? A little rough, but how essentially admirable! Perhaps if he had the stuff in him to act the master in his own house, Isabel would get down on her knees and worship, an adoring slave. Of course he didn't deserve adoration, but it would do Isabel no harm to practise the posture. Well, if she continued to lead him a dance, or wear him

out with the stupid commonplaces of her companionship, he deserved what he got. Mary was more than a little annoyed at him.

But somewhere still deeper in her consciousness, she knew her disappointment did not depend on his treatment of Isabel but on his cowardice toward herself. The reason she did not finish her meditation and go to sleep was that this knowledge tortured her, and she hesitated to admit its effect. Because he had asked it, she had gone to Boston—she really had gone in order to bring him the aid he had desired. Of course he hadn't asked her personally, and Isabel was the one who should have made the journey, but so far as his responsibility now was concerned, it came to the same thing. He had said he would always be grateful, yet when his wife began tormenting her, right before his face at his own table, he had been afraid to interfere, had raised not a finger in her defense, had taken refuge in small talk and silly patter. He wasn't worth worrying about. Somewhere in the world there must be real men; if she traveled far enough, she would find one.

The next two days were no happier for her than that evening. At intervals she tried to write, but her thoughts could not get free from that tangle in the Beauvel home. She wrote to a travel agency for circulars, but as soon as she had written, she knew she didn't want to go to Europe. It wasn't travel in itself she desired, but only to get away from what embarrassed her at home.

On the third morning she rang Winthrop's door-bell, and went to Isabel's room—Isabel asked her up. She was working at her typewriter and remained seated.

"I stopped in just for a moment to ask you a great

favor. A few days ago you were in my room asking a favor of me."

Isabel waited for her to go on.

"I want you now, at last, to tell your husband the truth, if not for your sake and his, at least for mine. When you confided in me you meant no harm, but from that moment I have been involved in what is none of my business. Now I'd like to get out. Tell him to-night. If you wish, lay all the blame on me, but tell him!"

Apparently Isabel had lost no sleep worrying over Mary's troubles. She could listen to her now and smile complacently.

"How deeply you are entangled in our affairs, Mary, you know better than I. Certainly it is as much to your interest as mine to tell him the truth. I leave it in your hands. You may tell him whenever you like."

"What do you mean? What are you trying to say under that chilly manner? Haven't I done just what you asked?"

There was no change in Isabel's glance.

"Absolutely, you did what I asked, and I'm grateful. My problem is solved, so far as it can be at present. If you and Winthrop now have a problem, settle it any way you like. It won't be necessary to consider my feelings. Tell him, to begin with, that I, not you, wrote the essay he admired."

"Isabel, you know I wasn't looking for credit I didn't deserve! . . . See here, Isabel, you're not jealous of me, are you?"

Isabel got up from her desk and came across the room, less to express cordiality than to suggest an end to the conversation.

"I wouldn't be jealous of any woman. If Winthrop loves you, Mary Allerton, I'd congratulate him on his excellent taste. So far as I know, he doesn't love you. It is true, however, that the suggestion you made to meet him in Boston, has ended in this, that you have more of his confidence than I have."

"But you urged me to go."

"I did."

"And I came here to beg you to tell him."

Isabel made no reply, and after a second Mary turned toward the door.

"It probably will not occur to you to invite me here again. You'll understand, of course, that from now on I shan't be able to come. How painful that evening must have been to you or to him, I can measure by my own sufferings."

Isabel let her go without another word, and Mary hurried back to her room, wounded and angry. No question now but that she must go abroad. How despicably Isabel had behaved! A most unpleasant revelation of the possibilities in woman's heart. Isabel would like to kill her. To speak of even ordinary courtesy between them was ridiculous.

Three afternoons later she had just finished studying the travel circulars and had decided on a boat to Naples, and a leisurely trip up the peninsula to Florence. Naples, Rome, Florence! Taken in series, if they couldn't drive the Beauvels out of her thoughts, she would be a proper subject for a psychiatrist. She was reaching for her letter paper, to write for her ticket, when she heard her landlady coming up the stairs, promising some stranger

to see if Miss Allerton was at home. She opened the door to greet the visitor. It was Winthrop.

"If you've a moment to spare," he said, "I'd like to come in."

"Of course. I'm delighted."

She managed to say the words quite steadily, but inside of herself she was trembling.

He moved toward the couch where Isabel always sat.

"Don't sit there, Winthrop, it won't be comfortable. Try this big chair."

He settled himself and looked up at her.

"That was a hell of an evening, Mary. I came to apologize. She *would* ask you."

"Don't I know, Winthrop? It's all right. I saw her the other morning."

She caught herself just in time. She had almost forgotten that he was outside the secret of that Boston visit.

"I went around to pay my party call."

He nodded, to show he understood.

"Mary, I don't see how I can keep on this way. When she wanted you for dinner, how was I to tell her that her friendship for you was now an embarrassment for you and me? And when she made those chance remarks, I thought I'd explode."

A wave of pleasure went through Mary's heart. How stupid she had been! Of course he couldn't have known that Isabel was teasing her—that's why he hadn't rushed to her defense.

"If she asks me again, Winthrop, I'll find some excuse for not going. In fact, the occasion won't arise. I'm planning to leave Fairfax."

"Don't say that."

"But I am. You understand why. If I stayed, Isabel and I should be meeting constantly, or even you and I, and it wouldn't be pleasant. I'll go now, and you two can make up, and work out your problem in peace."

He looked deeply worried.

"I don't want you to go, Mary. There's no one else I can talk to."

Just why she did it, she couldn't have explained. She was conscious only of a wish to be friendly and kind, but she leaned over and put her hands on his shoulders, and looked down into his eyes.

"That's why I must go," she said. "I can't let you talk to me any more. It's your duty to talk to Isabel."

He got to his feet quickly, and what she saw in his eyes made her step back.

"I can't talk to her! For the last time I tell you so. And I'll say now what's the truth, I'm not sure I want to make up with her, as you call it. I want the right to come here or wherever you are, and meet a genuine woman."

She knew she ought to hand him his hat, and she noticed with a flutter of hysterical amusement that it was on the chair behind him and she'd have to walk around to get it.

"Winthrop, I want you to go."

He picked up the hat himself, entirely docile.

"Very well, if you wish it."

She held the door open for him, yet she knew he was not thinking her unkind. Somehow she could not even pretend surprise when he caught her suddenly in his arms and bent her head back with the force of his kiss.

In the slowly dragging weeks before her steamer sailed, she was more than ever careful to avoid any possible meeting with his wife. Of course her neighbors had to know she was giving up her room, and the news must have reached Isabel, yet Mary was sure there would be no need of pretended cordiality at the moment of farewell. Before Winthrop had paid his unexpected visit to her, she had thought of stopping at the Beauvel home, just at the last, and saying good-by, but now she made up her mind to slip away quietly, and let them explain it to each other as they could.

Winthrop's emotion she did not look on as something for him to apologize for, nor for her to be ashamed of. She told herself it was only a natural hunger for sympathy, such a reaching out of one soul to another as intelligent people in a civilized age could admire. Love had nothing to do with it. Little as she knew the possible varieties of the masculine character, she was quite sure he wasn't the philandering type. It was because she had felt so safe with him that day at luncheon, because his honesty had called out so profound a respect, that she had made the error of postponing her confession. Of course if Isabel knew that he had kissed her, the situation would be difficult, and if he should feel that emotion again and should repeat the gesture, it would be—well, it would be to say the least unwise. No, she would go away secretly, and keep the pleasant memory of his arms around her, and of his ardent lips. If they weren't ardent, at least they came nearer to it than anything she had ever felt. She would see him no more, but the prospect gave her no pain, and that was proof that her heart had not been touched; and if her heart hadn't been

touched, then probably his hadn't been either, and there was nothing she ought to be sorry for.

What to do with the books and furniture, was a question. Had this been an ordinary journey in the days when she and Isabel were still friends, she would have stored her possessions in the Beauvel attic. Now with some difficulty she persuaded the local expressman to box the things and keep them until an indefinite date when she would send word where they were to be shipped. The couch, the table and the chair belonged to the landlady. She felt ironic significance in the fact that the couch where Isabel had liked to sit belonged to a stranger, and therefore would not follow her with disturbing memories.

Two evenings before she was to leave for New York, she was occupied at the table, writing a few last minute letters, one to her publisher about the new novel she now planned to write, one to a distant uncle who in some sentimental sense liked to call himself her guardian, without moral or other obligations on either side. She was in a lonely mood. Getting ready for the journey had driven into her consciousness her isolation from the world in general, her absorption during these past years in her friendship with Isabel. Except for old Uncle Robert, there was no one in Fairfax or elsewhere who would care greatly where she went. The landlady had been inconvenienced, but not seriously—the room would soon be taken, and its former occupant forgotten.

She couldn't help asking herself why she had made so few friends, and in the light of what had happened to her in these recent weeks the answer now seemed obvious. She had been just a little too intelligent, too

intellectual, rather, to be fond of the women she met, and she had been too correct in her standards of propriety to know many of the men. Her life had been composed of pleasant but casual acquaintances, and of one friendship which had been begun in inspiration and had ended in disillusion. From this moment she resolved to come nearer, if she could, to her fellows. She would begin in Europe, where perhaps it would be easier than in Fairfax, New York. She would——

Some one was knocking at her door. She looked around the bare room without its curtains, without the plants in the window-seat, with the books gone from the shelves and only the necessary bedclothes over the couch. Her social life in this community was ended, she had supposed.

"Come in," she said.

Winthrop came in quietly and shut the door behind him. Not knowing what sort of welcome would be proper, she said nothing. He came toward her, took both her hands, and drew her down on the couch beside him.

"I stopped for just a moment, to say good-by. Of course we all know you are going, and only I know the reason. Isabel is a little hurt, I am afraid, that you have been neglecting her, and that she heard of your departure from others. Of course I couldn't explain. It's come over me very clearly that my selfishness in writing the letter has disturbed a friendship precious to you both. I had to tell you that I am sorry."

"You needn't be, Winthrop. I don't consider it your fault."

He fell silent, as though his errand were finished.

"When do you go, Mary?"

"The day after to-morrow."

"Then I suppose this is the last time I am likely to see you. I stopped for just a moment, on the way to a committee meeting."

She knew, of course, that the committee was the excuse he had given to Isabel for going out that evening. Subterfuge still.

"After I left you the other day I didn't know but that you might be annoyed at me for the liberty I took. If I embarrassed you by coming in that way too, besides all the rest, please include it in the forgiveness I ask for."

His hand rested on hers ever so naturally. A warm, strong hand.

"I told you, Winthrop, there is nothing to forgive."

"Thank you," he said quite simply, once more as though he had come to an end. She waited for him to take away his hand, and go on to the committee meeting.

"It's extraordinary what help one human being can give to another, by accident, as it seems, unless there's more destiny in our experience than most of us admit. If I should say I was sorry I wrote that letter to you, it would be the truth, yet I shall never regret the one time in my life that a woman made me feel less of a failure than I know I am, less lonely than I must be."

She looked up in his face, responding instinctively to his praise of her. He drew her close to him, and kissed her again, this time without apparently feeling the need to apologize. She knew she ought to protest, or best of all, she ought to tell him now the whole truth. What difference would it make now what he thought of her, since she never would see him again? It would serve

Isabel right if she unfolded the whole story from beginning to end, and of course it was her duty.

"Winthrop, I've something to tell you. That kiss of yours has given me strength to say it. If I hurt you, if you are disappointed in me now, remember I never would have told you if you hadn't kissed me."

Beyond any possible expectation of hers the man suddenly lost all control of himself, went mad. She felt herself drawn into his arms, across his knees, looking up into his face close to her own, utterly silenced by his ruthless lips. Even then, though she struggled to free herself, though she was to see him no more, though this flame in him would be only a lightning flare for them both to remember or forget, as they chose—deep in her heart she was betrayed a little by the truth that this brutal and lawless passion of his was not altogether unpleasant.

Now he wasn't kissing her so continuously, he had something on his mind. What—she grew hysterical—what would come next? At this moment, of course, she ought to cry out.

He stood up with her in his arms. How strong he was! Then he laid her down again on the couch.

VI

It was as though a mist slowly cleared away from her brain. What stood out now was not what had happened, but what she must do. The words he was whispering in her ear, half of apology, half of shame curiously mixed with gratitude, she did not care to listen to. It was easy now to push him away. She stood up, reeled slightly, as though about to faint, steadied herself with her hand on the table. He tried to put a supporting arm around her. She found she could speak to him without bitterness.

"I'm all right, and I'd rather you didn't touch me again."

"I'm sorry, Mary. From the bottom of my heart I'm ashamed of myself. I'm a cad. Nothing was further from my intention than——"

"Winthrop, I was trying to tell you something. Please listen. I never wrote that essay. Isabel wrote it. Because she was afraid you might not approve, she didn't sign it. At her request I went to Boston to meet you in her place. The idea was mine first, a crazy one, but afterward she insisted that I carry it out. If she had talked frankly to you, or you had spoken to her, you both would have—we should all have been spared."

Her words seemed not to penetrate his brain. With an expression of dejection, almost of stupidity, he watched her as she went to the wardrobe and took out her hat and coat. Her steady hand arranged her hair

in the mirror, she put on the hat, straightened out her clothes.

"Where are you going, Mary?"

"To your house—to tell Isabel what you and I have done."

In a panic he clutched at her wrists.

"Take your hands off!"

He let her go.

"I beg your pardon," he said. He was so crushed and humbled that at another time she would have pitied him, but nothing mattered to her now except the feelings burning within her.

"Isabel had this urge to be sincere, and you were eating your heart out because you weren't frank, and I, who never worried about such things, but only enjoyed my friendship for her, I was dragged into your affairs, through no fault of mine, entangled in your falsehoods. Some one ought now to show you both what sincerity is. I guess that's for me to do."

He would have detained her if she had listened, but she had become adamant, and perhaps his pleadings were feeble, seeing that what she intended to do would bring on the fate proper for all three of them. The remnants of his better self pieced themselves together. He opened the door so that she could go out first, and without another word he followed her to the street.

"The car is here," he said.

"I must walk—I can't ride in your car."

"But you can't walk alongside while I take the car home!"

She got in beside him, and they rode to his door.

"Shall I ring?" she said.

He took out his key and let her in. A light was burning in the hall. Mary looked at him as though to suggest that under his own roof it was he who should summon his wife.

"Isabel!"

"Well?"

The voice came distinct but soft from some room up-stairs.

"Come down. Mary Allerton is here."

They could hear her stirring.

"When I'm out she likes to go to bed and read, or else she writes," he explained, as though that detail were important at the moment. He didn't ask Mary to be seated in the living room. They both waited standing in the hall.

Isabel came down the stairway quite unexcited, as though the visit were the thing to expect at that hour. She looked very proud and determined, an impressive figure, Mary thought, every inch a strong-minded and capable woman, even though she had not delayed to make herself more impressive by choice of costume. She had only stepped into her slippers and drawn a dressing gown over her night-robe. At the foot of the stairs she came to a halt and looked from one to the other, ready for what they had to say to her.

Mary went at once to the point.

"Isabel, I've come here to be sincere. You can write another essay now out of your sorrow, and Winthrop's, and mine. I've told him the whole truth. He knows I am an impostor. From you I've learned that you don't love him as much as you'd like to, and he has told me he's not so happy with you as he ought to be. If you both

had taken my advice and had faced your troubles between yourselves, I shouldn't be hurting you now with what I am going to say. You will always blame me, but it's not my fault—nor yours, for that matter, nor his."

Isabel's eyes narrowed a little.

"You intend to surprise me with the news that you and he are in love?"

"We're not. I don't care if I never see him again, and that's how he feels about me, but he came and asked for a little comfort, and I tried to be an encouraging friend. That was all—but as I told you once, there's a logic in other things beside the mind, once you accept the premises. So you might as well know what has happened."

The other woman waited so calmly, she wondered if her confession had been plain enough. It was to Winthrop that Isabel turned to speak.

"You've come to tell me she's your mistress. I admire your frankness."

Winthrop blazed out furious.

"By God, she's not! I've wronged her, as she says, but——"

Mary looked at him.

"I didn't say you wronged me!"

"I say so. And why I did it, I can't tell. But it was fine of her to come here, Isabel, and end the sham you and I have been living in."

His wife nodded.

"Quite right. And it's no shock to me—that you've loved her, I've known for some time."

"But I don't."

"Discuss that with her, Winthrop, it's not my affair.

I'm glad we know exactly which way we are all going. I will give you a divorce wherever and whenever you wish. It's too late to-night to leave this house. To-morrow I'll go. You and Mary can arrange your plans as you see fit."

"But I don't want a divorce!"

"Without it you can't marry her."

"Isabel, whether he wishes to or not, I'll never marry him. I don't love him."

Isabel looked at them both with undisguised contempt.

"I'm not modern enough to follow your minds," she said. "Your frankness is all very well, but you evidently suppose it will make no difference in our relations. You two drop in here at the end of the evening to tell me what you've been doing, and you expect me not to be excited, because, as you explain, you are not really lovers after all. If I came up to your expectations, I dare say I should now retire quietly and read myself to sleep over a book. Winthrop would see you home, Mary, and then come back to take his accustomed place beside me. I'm sorry, but I'm not up to that chivalry. I shall go. Not that I condemn you at all, or criticize you. I spoke of the divorce only to be helpful, not for revenge, nor to punish Winthrop. Now do what you like. So far as I am concerned, the subject is finished."

She started up the stairs again. Winthrop tried to call her back.

"You can't settle your life, or mine, or Mary's, so quickly as that. You haven't made the least attempt to find out our true feelings, whether we have done a wicked thing or only a tragic one. You haven't taken the

trouble to notice whether we came here to torment you or to ask for aid and pardon."

Mary laid her hand on his arm.

"I never came to ask for pardon. I've done nothing wrong. I came to tell the truth."

"Well, then, I need the pardon. The blame is mine."

Isabel looked at him over the balustrade.

"Celia will be coming in any minute, Winthrop. I'd prefer not to have her discover a scene in your front hall."

"See here, Isabel, you started the whole thing, in the first place! You'll give me a divorce, will you? You mean, you'll give yourself one! You wrote of sincerity, but you were planning to be free. Do you think you can get away with this, and be marrying some other man one of these days, having your will and staying respectable too?"

She blazed down at him, as angry as he, but still self-controlled.

"I shall never ask for a divorce for myself—there would be no other man. I thought only of Mary and you."

She left them there, and they could hear her walk to the other side of the house and close the door of her room. Winthrop felt ashamed of what he had said. He turned to Mary.

"I've made a wreck of your life."

"How perfectly absurd! When we've all had time to think it over, there'll be nothing to regret. You and she can have the freedom you were really yearning for, though you didn't quite know it, and I shall go on my journey and learn something about the world we're supposed to live in. Good night, Winthrop, and good-by."

She held out her hand in complete comradeship.

"I'll take you home," he said.

"Impossible, Winthrop! I can easily go alone."

He followed her outside to the doorstep.

"Mary, if she really leaves, I go too. I'll not stay to face my thoughts of all this, with you and her both out of my life, and the devil of a scandal breaking around me."

Mary laughed.

"The scandal, of course, would be disagreeable."

"I didn't mean that. I meant, if she leaves, you and I go together."

"Where should we go?"

"That makes no difference. Our fates have met in this bad accident—somehow from now on we can't be altogether separate—at least not if Isabel goes."

In the darkness Mary turned from him.

"What you and I ought to do now, does not depend on her. Good night, Winthrop."

He took a step or two after her, caught her by the shoulders and turned her around.

"You can't go that way, Mary. I won't let you."

Her nerves had lasted out as long as they could. The sympathy in his tone, slight though it was, more duty than affection, sufficed to break down the coldness of her pretended courage. Her head dropped on his shoulder, and her body shook with the sobs she could stifle but not quite suppress.

He all but lifted her into the car, drove her to the house which she had planned soon to leave, watched her enter the door, waited till she had climbed the stairs to her room and he could see her lighted lamp, suddenly garish, through the uncurtained window.

Part Three

THE PURSUIT OF LOGIC

THE PURSUIT OF LOGIC

I

Isabel raised her eyes from the book she was only pretending to read, and watched the horizon appear and disappear from the windows which protected the deck. No one had ever told her how sleep-inducing a voyage is. When she came on board, she had been seething with excitement, partly from the agony of tearing herself away from the old life, partly because of the new experiences she was hurling herself into with all her will. But one day out had reduced her to a purring lethargy which she had first resisted, but to which she now submitted gladly. It was a kind of rest she had not known before, a release from engagements, responsibilities, duties. Even her first resolve to do so many turns around the deck each morning, had quickly weakened, and without inconvenience to her conscience. She would make a feeble attempt at this exercise, then through unconquerable laziness resign herself to her deck chair, let the steward tuck in the blanket, and there lie comatose, conscious of varied thoughts, none of which needed to be pursued—thoughts neither exciting nor the opposite, neither happy nor sad, thoughts of a ghostly consistence without sap, unrooted in any experience that was real.

Other passengers, she noted, were concerned over the number of miles they covered daily on their swift journey to France. She could get up no interest in the

figures. She was going to France, not because she was eager to get there, but because she was leaving Winthrop and Mary. . . . Or perhaps she was leaving them because she had always wanted to go to France. That was the way her thoughts contradicted themselves, under the spell of the boat. She didn't much care which was the truth. The stewards were getting out their little wagon to serve the morning broth.

On the train which brought her to New York she had relived angrily those last hours with Winthrop, justifying to herself the firmness with which she had broken apart their destinies. He had stuck to his decision to have no divorce, or at least to make no use of one if she insisted on divorcing him. Very well then, she wouldn't insist, but some day he might be sorry. . . . There was that brief note from Mary, too, which she had read perhaps too hastily and torn into small pieces, but the substance was fixed in her memory—Mary would never marry Winthrop, she had written, no matter what Isabel did; marriage was either a precious thing or else irrelevant. In either case what had happened was no proper preface to it. Let her think so if she liked. Isabel was through with them both.

Yet when Winthrop had told her in their last words together that he wished she wouldn't go, that if she were broad-minded, she would accept what had gone before as an unhappy but not necessarily fatal result of his unsound philosophy and her own, and that if she would forgive him, he would try to be a satisfactory husband and let her branch out into whatever sort of life she thought good; when he had pleaded with that honest look in his eyes which once she had admired, and in the days

of their own courtship had thought irresistible—her conscience really had bothered her a little, and it was only with an effort that she had carried out her resolve. It had shamed her to realize that she was indeed following a resolve, an almost but not quite conscious plan. She had answered in the tone of virtue that he now owed nothing to her but much to Mary, that his real motive for asking her to stay was probably his fear of scandal, of peril to his reputation, perhaps even of injury to his business. Aware at once of the hurt she was inflicting on him, she had struck harder and had added that if this prudence of his stood in the way of a divorce and of prompt justice to Mary, she would accept his decision and take no legal steps against him. He must remember, she said, that she was leaving not because she wished to live with another man but because it would be unworthy to live longer with him. He had argued no more—only had asked her what money she would need for her travels, and whether he could help her get her ticket. She couldn't recall now why at that point she had lost her temper, but certainly it was less than gracious to remind him that her modest earnings as a writer had for some time been more than his income, and that she could very well look after herself. What she had meant to express, of course, was pride of independence, but somehow she had stumbled into a form of words which implied dissatisfaction with what he had been able to give her. It mixed the issues. And just at the last she had thought of a deliberate insult—she had asked whether he wished her to take Mary's ticket off her hands.

As she thought it over in the train, she had been disappointed, therefore, with her own behavior at the mo-

ment of exit. And worse than that, her conscience insisted on whispering that even had it been possible, a reconciliation with Winthrop was not what she wished. Before she had ever thought of the essay, what she had been desiring, perhaps, was freedom to know the world—liberty to go about and learn how men and women live, opportunity to enrich her art by a more general study of mankind than was possible in Fairfax. Of course, that was what the essay almost said, but it hadn't told the world what now she wished she could put out of her thoughts, her dissatisfaction with the marriage state as such, her wish to get away from Winthrop, not because he was an unsatisfactory husband, but just because he was her husband. It hadn't confessed her complete weariness of a contract which she had once been glad to dedicate with a vow and to embellish with orange blossoms, a contract to live in the same house with the same person three hundred and sixty-five days for the rest of her years. To admit this central motive of her discontent would bring down with a crash the structure of wisdom, of logic, of social justice, which the fatal essay had somehow raised. If she faced the truth herself, she would be ridiculous, and it helped little to realize that perhaps this same boredom was all that had upset Winthrop. To admit so much would lead to the unwelcome thought that a good vacation might have cured them both. In that case, of course, Mary would have been spared. For her, certainly, the future held nothing pleasant, at least not as the result of her acquaintance with the Beauvel household. Though Isabel knew she was in no way to blame for Mary's plight, yet the plight would not have been so awkward if she had stayed, at least until Mary could leave first.

Against these troublesome thoughts of the train she had maintained a defense by keeping alive her anger. She reminded herself that in whatever words Mary and Winthrop might choose to put it, with whatever ingenious excuses, they still had done her an injury which no self-respecting woman would put up with. If she had felt an unexpected twinge of satisfaction when Mary had returned from Boston and had reported the encounter with Winthrop with obvious intention to deceive, if she had even felt a little gust of triumph that awful night on the staircase when they had run home like naughty children to confess—well, she told herself it wasn't because she knew then she could surely get away. No, it was because she had been looking for sincerity, and from that moment, sad as her life would have to be, every fact was clear, and they all knew their own souls, for better or for worse. She had to go over this formula many times before it carried conviction, and it convinced her most when she permitted herself to be as angry as a good woman deceived has a right to be.

But now on the boat these thoughts became less acrid, less torturing, less insistent. She would suffer them again, perhaps, from the moment she landed at Havre, but in mid-ocean the sting of experience and the prick of conscience were both mercifully dulled. She closed her eyes and listened to the throb of the engine. The steward had told her the engine made absolutely no vibration. Apparently he thought she didn't want it to, and he lived to please. Well, if it wasn't the engine, perhaps it was the dynamo, or something. Anyway, she liked it.

Just as she opened her eyes again, a man was passing. He glanced over at her and smiled. Involuntarily she smiled back. He took off his cap.

"The boat isn't too much for you, I hope?"

"Oh, not a bit. I'm just lazy."

"Good. It's as smooth as a mill-pond to-day."

His accent was slightly foreign. She watched him as he continued his exercise down the deck. Somewhere she had seen him before. It really didn't matter. She closed her eyes again. Oh, yes—he was the man at the next table. She had asked the head steward for a place to herself—that was because she was, as it were, in a kind of mourning, though the world did not know it, and she preferred not to have her thoughts disturbed by the chatter of strangers. Now when she went down to the dining-room, she sat by a small table intended for two, at the edge of the gallery. It was rather interesting to survey the main floor below, and watch the evening display of gowns, or note which of the passengers had been asked to dine with the captain. She had kept her eyes somewhat from the people who ate in the gallery with her, but at the next table she had noticed this man. Certainly a foreigner, Roumanian, or Portuguese, or perhaps Spanish. Really, foreigners were hard to identify when they were so well educated. She wished she knew what a Bulgarian would look like. This might be one. He was dark in every way—black hair and eyes, olive skin, a mustache, but not like Winthrop's, much more chic. She wondered if he put anything on his hair to make it lie smooth. His clothes were excellent, but she detected exaggeration in his shoes. They were over-fastidious, a little effeminate. He would be perfect if he wore English boots.

At the beginning of the voyage she had supposed that only the sick remained on deck, but it occurred to her

now that she might be original, adventurous, and have her lunch up there, even though her health was perfect. But when she called the steward he brought her the menu as though her request were the usual thing, and in a few minutes set before her a dainty lunch—what she had ordered and a few happy thoughts of his own. She looked askance at the small bottle of champagne on the tray, not quite sure if it was champagne, or ginger ale—which she preferred. She might have asked the steward, but she didn't wish to betray her inexperience. At home she would have sent the bottle away, not because she disliked it, but because it was an extravagance, except at weddings. Here she preferred to seem just a little sophisticated. The steward broke the wire on the neck of the bottle, wrapped his napkin around it, and by slow and skilful twistings, induced the cork to come forth without the slightest explosion.

"There!" he said. "Even if Madame is not sick, this will make her feel better."

Isabel left the glass untouched, and enjoyed the chicken on the plate before her. Because time counted for nothing, she prolonged the meal by intervals of day-dreaming. She was just ready at last for the steward to come and take the tray away, when her acquaintance of the morning, the man who sat at the table next to her, came along the deck. He stopped with friendly concern.

"Why, you really *are* under the weather!"

She laughed.

"Not at all. I'm a rank impostor. Nothing but sheer laziness."

"I'm so glad. . . . May I sit down for a moment?"

"Do, please."

He took the foot of the deck chair next to her, so that he could watch her face.

"Didn't you like your champagne?"

There was no reason in the world why she couldn't say that she disliked it, but she hated to have him, though he was a total stranger, think her ignorant of the ways of the great world.

"This particular champagne," she said, "doesn't appeal to me."

"But you should have had the kind you like. I'll call the steward."

"Please don't. I don't care for any now."

He relaxed himself on the deck chair again.

"You're going to France, of course," he said. "A lovely country."

She might have replied that she didn't yet know how lovely it was, but it was easier just to nod her head. Then in order to make herself feel more comfortable with the silent fib, she added in an impulse of confiding:

"I'm not quite sure where I'm going, but I'll probably stay in France. I'm a writer, you know."

Clearly he was interested, and thought better of her.

"Ah, indeed! I've probably read your books. Of course, I don't know your name."

"Isabel Beauvel."

She saw him getting ready to lie like a gentleman.

"The name is familiar. It's a great privilege to meet you. I am not literary myself, but I've followed American books rather closely in recent years."

"You come over on business?"

He smiled.

"I have no such good excuse. I am engaged in an old-world profession which you Americans do not understand. Not a profession but an art—the pursuit of pleasure."

When she looked a little puzzled, he hastened to add:

"I have been busy visiting your California coast."

"I hope you found it beautiful?"

She asked the question as though she knew California well.

"Beautiful, Madame? Ravishing. Far more interesting than the Riviera. That is, in natural endowments."

She wondered what the qualification meant.

"I may go to the Riviera now myself. It would be a good place to settle down and write."

"Marvelous! Nice, for example. There are quieter spots on the way down—you know Arles, don't you? And every one knows Avignon. But Nice is the only place. That is, if you like the sort of world one finds there. Very few Americans understand it. You will pardon me for saying that."

"Of course," she answered cheerfully. "It's different from our world at home."

"Pardon me, not so very different if you can look beneath the surface—everywhere men and women are the same. But you Americans prefer not to look beneath, and perhaps you are right. Your point of view seems to give you, if not wisdom, at least youth. There, I have spoken too plainly. No doubt I have offended you."

She smiled at him.

"It really is very interesting, what you said."

"But you have thought of it yourself, Madame, I am sure."

"I probably have."

They had established a bond of sympathy, based upon her supposed knowledge of life.

"In Europe," he went on, "we don't understand American novels—that is, most of them, though I've no doubt your own are more in our tradition. You have had the advantage of travel."

"I think I know what you mean," she said, "yet I wish you'd explain what it is you find difficult in our stories."

"Why, they don't like to represent the conduct of men and women as it really is, the result of many motives most of which the actors are not conscious of. Your American stories always make people decide what to do and then try to do it. I can't see how any one could live till the age of thirty and still so deceive himself."

She recalled enough philosophy to challenge him.

"You don't believe we are mere mechanisms, do you? Haven't we a conscious will?"

He smiled a little condescendingly.

"Madame, you have no idea, perhaps, how American that question is. From one extreme to the other! No, our conduct is partly the result of our wills, and partly the consequence of impulse and other forces, of which we are not always aware. To tell the truth of any life, an author would have to know in what proportions these elements mingle."

She looked troubled.

"In that case, an author would probably never tell the truth."

"Well," he said, "do you know any author who does —the absolute truth?"

"Oh, when you put it that way, of course. . . . But if we can't know all the motives, we are not really in a position to judge."

He smiled.

"Only American authors are. Again I except your books. I'm sorry I haven't had the privilege of reading them yet."

She was sensible of the thoroughness with which it had been her habit to dispose of the villains, and the long life and happiness measured out to those she had chosen as the good. For the first time she was glad that some one had not read her books.

"Most of us, I suppose, are what you'd call too moral."

"No," he said, "I should call your writers immoral. They do not tell the truth. Even if he can't tell all the truth, a moral writer, from my point of view, would study this world as humbly and as impersonally as a scientist, assuming that what nature and God permit to happen is more important than any of our philosophic prejudgments. That's why you Americans have produced only one love story, and that one you don't yet appreciate."

She looked up at him in question.

He laughed.

"No, I don't mean *The Courtship of Miles Standish.* I mean *The Scarlet Letter.*"

Her mind refused to grasp the distinction as quickly as she wished. She resolved to think it out after he had gone. For the present she was content to say:

"How well read you are! I wish I knew European literature so thoroughly as you know ours."

He rejected the compliment.

"You have read more than I. The moment I saw you, I knew you had traveled and had explored life intellectually, too. Really, you are European, Madame Isabel. Or *is* it Madame?"

For the first time she had to betray her maimed state.

"I have a husband," she said, "but we don't live together."

"Ah," he said, sympathetically. "I beg your pardon. I have a wife, too."

Before she went to dinner that evening, she consulted the diagram of the tables, and found out his name. A very difficult last name which she could not pronounce, and which she immediately forgot. The first name was Carl. She couldn't make out whether there was an *o* on the end of it, but that was only a foreign appendage, anyway. Essentially he was Carl. The talk with him had made her self-conscious. She could not quite explain why she dressed so carefully for dinner, nor why she wished her evening gown were a little more daring. At the last minute she managed to adjust it to the opposite effect from the one she would have sought for at home.

As she went down to the table, she met him by chance on the stairs. In his eyes she caught a look of approval, perhaps of admiration.

"You make me feel quite lonely," he said. "Man is never so ridiculous as when he has to watch himself eating."

"Why don't you come to my table?"

As the ship lurched slightly, he took hold of her arm.

"Do you know, I had half a hope you would invite me."

For the rest of the voyage he was her dinner companion, always tactful, and in subtle ways flattering. At lunch he managed, with a delicacy which she appreciated, not to intrude upon her, finding excuses always to join other men, or to take his meal before or after she did, avoiding the slightest danger of boring her, of wearing out his welcome. A perfect gentleman, she told herself many times. And she had grown so used to posing before him as broad-minded and much experienced, that it was no longer a pose. At least she had persuaded herself that what she permitted him to think of her was a true portrait of Isabel Beauvel, and that what once resided in Fairfax had been only the possibilities of her character, suppressed. So many fresh ideas had flooded her mind, thanks to his stimulating talk, that she was eager to get at her typewriter again. She had at least one new story to write, perhaps two, and they would be different from anything she had done, bolder, more sincere, or as he would say, more nearly true. She was happy to be sure her decision was justified. She was out of prison at last, she was about to be herself.

The night before they landed, he conferred with the head waiter, and together they contrived a masterpiece, a dinner which rose by logical degrees from caviar to *crêpe suzette*. Knowing her indifference to wine, he spared her, but of course there had to be champagne. He always insisted on that. Each evening he had persuaded her to try it, and if she didn't yet care for it, she was at least beginning not to object.

Through the meal his conversation was, if anything, more graceful than usual, certainly more animated, and though she talked little, she knew he was aware of her

happiness with him. Together they watched the brandy poured on the *crêpes*, and the lighted flame playing above and below the chafing dish.

"It's the ceremony which counts," said Carl. "That's a parable of life. There's no true pleasure without etiquette. Again, if you will forgive me, Madame Isabel, that is something you must teach your fellow novelists in America. In the last chapter, when the lover takes the lady in his arms, you tell us that he kissed her, for fear we might possibly think he did not. You forget to assure us of what is much more important, that he did anything else. For human beings just to clutch each other and smack their lips is—well, it is not art."

"Tell me what I ought to put into my next story."

He was amused at her.

"Never will I so reveal the limitations of my knowledge, Madame Isabel. You, being a person with imagination, surely know more than I do."

"Yes, but you put things in such a clever way. They sound quite fresh."

"Well," he said, a little more seriously, "if it is true as I believe that our conduct is compounded of motives partly conscious and voluntary, partly unsuspected by us, then I should think a novelist would be less interested in saying that people kissed than in showing the steps which brought them to that admirable conclusion. I don't see why the novelist should be less an artist than the lover himself. Men and women who know anything about life, know of course, by what exquisite and subtle technique even ecstasy should be approached, unless it is to lose some of its bloom."

"Of course," she said. She was thinking of the dif-

ference between this accomplished man and poor Winthrop at home, who never had heard of the approaches to ecstasy, and who probably was unteachable. Till the end of his life he would be tripping over his ecstasies. She realized how fast her education was proceeding, and once more thanked heaven for courage to be herself.

On the open deck above the smoking room they lingered over coffee and liqueurs. At last he asked whether she cared to go down and dance. Until that evening she had declined this suggestion, suspecting, as was the case, that he could dance better than she. Now she did her best, and got out of it as quickly as possible.

"If you don't mind, I'd rather walk on the deck."

"I'd much rather myself," he said.

When they had made several turns, he proposed that they rest for a moment, and found two deck chairs in a deserted corner. There he wrapped her considerately in the blankets, and they sat, comfortable and rather silent, he smoking, she thinking of what he had said, of what she was going to write, to some extent of the pleasure she was deriving from his presence beside her. At last she feared she had no right to prolong the evening.

"I suppose I ought to go down," she said. "I've been monopolizing you."

"You should never go for that reason."

"Well, we must say good-by some time, and perhaps it's cowardly to postpone the moment."

Then, because she feared her phrase might sound too bold, she added:

"We land to-morrow evening."

For a moment he was silent.

"Madame Isabel, I count it a very great privilege to

have met you. We have understood each other. What more can human beings ask, small atoms that we are, thrown together in our blind progress through this universe?"

Suddenly, with no presumption in his manner, he laid his hand gently on hers.

"You know that wonderful poem of your Walt Whitman:

" 'Out of the rolling ocean the crowd came a drop gently to me,
Whispering *I love you, before long I die.*' "

He repeated the lines with an exquisite inflection. Some comment, of course, was needed. Ever so slightly, merely to show literary appreciation, she squeezed his hand. They sat there immovable.

"Oh, well," she said, stirring in the blankets, "it really is time to go."

He helped her to her feet, and when she looked up at him to say her thanks for a happy evening, his eyes were swimming with an emotion she did not recognize.

"May I come?" he said softly.

In all innocence she asked, "Where?"

"To your cabin—in half an hour."

She turned faint. The habits of her soul, and of the souls of her ancestors, recoiled from the indecent proposal. How could he make it—he—and to her! How could he murder the purity of their companionship, steal away the happiness, put in its place this horror! . . .

Yet what she heard herself saying to him was:

"Carl dear—I'd rather not—not on the boat."

At once he understood the delicacy of her thought.

"You are quite right! Nothing is less discreet than a boat. If I had not been carried out of myself, I should not have asked you to take the risk."

Until they landed she avoided him, and on the train to Paris was glad to find herself in a compartment where all the other seats were taken. So this was the way men tried to seduce women—that is, men in Europe! She would do what he had advised, she would set down the steps by which the brutal male approaches, or tries to approach, his satisfactions. Her next story would be worth while.

To be sure, a slight uneasiness remained with her over the way she had replied to the awful idea, but she had been as frank as such a man deserved. In fact, she was rather proud to discover that she was learning how to handle such people. Best to get rid of them without a scene.

II

In Paris she found herself in a small hotel in the rue du Condé. She had selected the name from a guide-book, partly because the house was near the Odéon and the Luxembourg, therefore, she was sure, in a romantic neighborhood, and partly because the guide-book said it was cheap. Independent as she had felt at home, she was at once more cautious over here, even where prices were lower. She would live prudently until she could be certain that her inspiration would flow, and that the editors at home would remain well disposed toward her work.

She settled quickly into a well-planned routine. Each morning she wrote for two or three hours on her new short story, the one she had thought of on the boat. It was to be about an American woman who traveled abroad and almost lost her heart to a fascinating European—almost, but by good luck, not entirely. Isabel intended to be bold and admit that her heroine liked the seductive ways of the foreigner. As yet she was not clear how the story ought to turn out. Of course the heroine would emerge triumphant, but whether by luck or by shrewd and virtuous strategy, she had not decided. The luck would indicate the protection against evil which even the feeble may enjoy in this world; the strategy, on the other hand, would put the heroine's character in a better light. What made her hope that the story would be an advance on anything she had yet written was her resolve

to reveal completely, for the instruction and perhaps for the saving of innocent womanhood, the fiendish yet subtle steps by which the predatory male approaches his victim. She found it not altogether unpleasant to elaborate this part of the narrative.

After her morning's task she would visit the wonderful book stalls in the arcade of the Odéon, or would stop at the Luxembourg for a few minutes to admire the paintings and statues she had all her life seen in reproductions. In the afternoon, if there were a matinée at the Odéon or at the Comédie, she would go, or else she would walk through another hundred yards or so of the Louvre, or look at Napoleon's hats in the Invalides. And one day she had an immense thrill from the tomb stones in Père la Chaise. Only at intervals did her thoughts go back to Winthrop and Mary. She had escaped at last from bondage, and was luxuriating in the sense of liberty, even in the sense of being a little bold.

The people who stayed at the hotel, she discovered, did not necessarily eat there. It seemed to be the fashion to take your meals wherever you happened to be when the hour arrived. This custom was all very well, she thought, provided that at meal time you were lucky enough to be in the right place. Her first attempts to select a restaurant were influenced more by the name of the place than by any information as to the food. La Choppe Latine appealed to her, because it was located on a romantic corner, and anything with such a whimsical title must be worth while. But it proved to be too popular, and most of its patrons were indefatigable smokers. She had to give it up as a lunching place because her eyes smarted when next she bent over her

portable, to tap out her picture of the wickedness of the world. The Medici restaurant was better as to smoke, and wonderful as to food. If it hadn't been expensive she would have gone there regularly, but at least she could dine there every other night, and in between retrench at the hotel.

It was at the hotel, on one of the economical evenings, that she met Mr. Rawley, an apparently open-souled young Englishman, a little younger than herself. She had heard that Englishmen were distant in their manners, but Mr. Rawley at all times wore the air of enjoying himself hugely, and he had a strong talent for making you feel at sight that you had known him since you were born. Isabel and he began their acquaintance in the corridor, when he offered her his copy of the *Herald-Tribune*.

"I see you're not very strong in French," he ventured. "I can't make out a word of it myself, except with the dictionary, and it's no use trying because the newspapers don't tell you the news anyway—nothing but their parliamentary debates."

Was there any good reason why she shouldn't accept his newspaper? But from that moment he was her oldest friend, her inevitable companion. Or if she disengaged herself from him, he made her feel she wasn't polite.

She noticed that he reached whatever end he wished with a sureness of touch which reminded her of Carl, but with far less subtlety. When Carl had wished to dine at her table, he had introduced the thought of loneliness, of the misery of the human being who has to contemplate his own eating. Then he had met her on the stairway, and made it possible for her to invite him.

He had been gracious enough to allow her to do the inviting. When Mr. Rawley, however, found her eating in the hotel restaurant, he seated himself in the chair on the opposite side of the table, with a hearty, "Here we are!"

She had never met such a curiosity, so natural and so direct, as his. When he wanted to know anything, he asked a question. For example, he cleared up his doubts about her name by the simple inquiry:

"By the way, are you Mrs. or Miss?"

And when she had said she was Mrs:

"And is Mr. Beauvel dead, or in America?"

She was conscious of some coldness in her manner, as she reported on Winthrop's whereabouts.

"That's like your husbands," he went on cheerily. "I've heard the American men are an awfully good sort, letting their wives travel without them."

She was annoyed.

"Is there a Mrs. Rawley?"

"Indeed, yes. In Birmingham."

"She must be a good sort, too."

"She is! Awfully jolly girl."

She couldn't quite analyze his psychology, but she knew he was not embarrassed by unfulfilled or unexpressed aspirations. Whatever his inner life might be, this young man was in harmony with himself. His self-poise gave him a sort of impressiveness, even though he did take it upon his shoulders to straighten out the errors of a casual acquaintance like herself.

"You don't mean to say, Mrs. Beauvel, that you spend your time in the Louvre and the Luxembourg, and at the rotten shows at the Odéon! My dear woman, that's not

Paris at all. That's only the moss on the monument! I'll show you the town, if you like."

Isabel thanked him without saying too positively whether or not she would like it. His offer seemed to her somewhat presuming, but perhaps he was only ignorant, and it would be true kindness to rebuke him indirectly.

"I've never been in England," she said, "and I suppose if I were visiting London, I'd look up the old things first, the Tower, St. Paul's, Westminster."

"Oh, but that's the thing to do in London—the old things are the interesting ones there, the National Gallery, the Abbey, and all that, but over here they have new ideas every so often, and they know how to entertain the world. That's where we Anglo-Saxons have to take lessons from them."

She administered her reproof in a clearer form.

"Is Birmingham an interesting city?"

"I'm used to it, of course. No, I shouldn't say it was interesting. Not in comparison with Paris."

"Your wife must like it if she never goes away."

Mr. Rawley was entirely undisturbed. She would have to strike harder if she wished to prick his conscience.

"As a matter of fact, my wife hates it. She's from Devonshire. If it weren't for the boy, she'd come along with me wherever I go."

"Oh, you have a son."

"Three years and a half."

He seemed so fond of the child, if one could judge by the new animation in his face, that she marveled again at the contradiction and complexity of the masculine nature, which finds room for many affections at once. A

good wife and a nice child, yet here he was flirting with a strange woman in Paris. As to the steps by which he had reached this inclusive kind of ecstasy, she couldn't make the slightest guess.

Perhaps because he had criticized her taste in theatrical performances, she stopped at a ticket agency near the opera two days later, to inquire what shows they would recommend to a seeker of the latest Parisian novelty. At least she got as far as the door. In the window were a number of little dolls seven inches or so in height, brazen little creatures quite inadequately dressed, some of them with nothing on at all, yet fashioned to represent the human body with provoking realism. Since many people were passing at the moment, she was about to avert her eyes, when a middle-aged man and a woman apparently his wife, solid and respectable, both of them, stopped frankly for a moment to amuse themselves with what had offended her. Well, if that was the correct way to behave in this city, no use being a prude. She studied the playbill inside, pasted on the door, until the man and his wife had gone on, then she went out again and gazed resolutely at the dolls. They really were very lovely. She supposed this was what people meant when they referred to the pagan spirit of the Latin races, which never pretended it disliked to look at the body. If you had the Latin spirit, you could inspect undressed dolls without blushing. After all, the Latin races were probably right. When discussing the narrowness of communities like Fairfax, she had herself defended the Latin temperament—of course very theoretically—and with a little practise she now thought she could get used to it.

Her eye fell on small boxes of post-cards, displayed tastefully around the dolls. At first glance she had not noticed them. Good heavens! They were photographs of absolutely naked women, and the names of the women were attached—Mademoiselle So-and-So, appearing nightly in such-and-such a revue. She realized she had gone to the wrong agency. Her cheeks burned a little as she hurried on a hundred yards, and appraised new styles of lingerie in the windows of the Grande Maison de Blanc.

That night she went to the Medici restaurant for dinner to avoid Mr. Rawley's attentions, but when she came back he was smoking as usual in the corridor. He jumped up and came to greet her. In spite of her prejudice, she was conscious of his frank, kind eyes and of the open expression of his face. Really he was only an over-grown boy, after all. It would be hard to be very angry with him.

"I say, Mrs. Beauvel, how about some theater to-morrow night?"

"You are very kind," she said, "but I've been working hard lately, and I rather think I ought to rest in the evenings."

Her excuse did sound absurd. He stared at her.

"But there's no better place to rest than at a show. I'd love to take you to a good restaurant, and then we could see something interesting. There's a new bill at the Moulin Rouge."

Several of the ladies whose photographs she had looked at could be seen in person at the Moulin Rouge. Her lips drew a little thin.

"Not the Moulin Rouge, please, Mr. Rawley. That's vulgar, don't you think?"

"I haven't seen the new show—the last one suited me down to the ground. But that's all right—please yourself. We'll try something else."

She was under the impression that she had declined his hospitality, but he evidently did not understand it so.

"Really, Mr. Rawley, perhaps I'd better not go tomorrow night."

He smiled persistently—a terribly difficult person to discourage.

"Better take the plunge and get it over with, Mrs. Beauvel. Too much Odéon has sapped the heart out of you. Have one look at the real thing here, and you won't waste your evenings meditating in a hotel room."

She would have to tell him the truth.

"Mr. Rawley, you're extremely kind, but nothing I've heard about the theaters here makes me eager to see them. Perhaps if I understood French better—but then again perhaps it's as well I don't."

Clearly he was disappointed in her.

"I shouldn't have asked you, Mrs. Beauvel, if I thought there was anything wrong with the plays. Perhaps I'm stupid, though I did think I knew what was off color—and I wouldn't try to entertain a lady where she wouldn't be comfortable. But let it be as you say. I was thinking too much of myself, I suppose—I wanted the pleasure you would have given me by coming along."

After that she could do nothing but be gracious.

"Some other time perhaps. You're really very kind, but just for the present I'm not in the mood."

Slight as the incident was, or ought to have been, it occupied her thoughts. She wondered whether the experience of recent months had compelled her to be introspective, or whether living alone as she now was doing

gave her too much leisure, too many opportunities for morbid brooding. To a slight degree she was annoyed at herself, not because her resentment of vulgarity was wrong, and not because she cared very much one way or another what the young Englishman thought of her, but because her way of handling him had been, after all, prudish rather than skilful. She wished she could have got rid of him as easily as she had of Carl. Carl's proposal was certainly more detestable than an invitation to any theater, however Parisian, yet in the desperate case she had been wordly wise and at ease, and in the simpler matter, a little awkward. "I wouldn't try to entertain a lady where she wouldn't feel comfortable," he had said. Then he thought that he was protecting her, perhaps that she really didn't know the world. What a wicked smile would have come into Carl's eyes had he heard what she said to Mr. Rawley.

Each time she saw the young man after that, from day to day, her annoyance and her embarrassment revived, all the more because he greeted her with a slight addition of dignity and aloofness. He no longer put himself at her table, he proffered no further invitations. Of course it was absurd to feel a little guilty, but he actually was creating the impression that he rather than herself had been offended.

She met him one day in the elevator as she was coming in from a visit to Victor Hugo's house in the Place Vosges. Since the elevator had hardly room for two, he offered to let her press the button and go up first. Just because his courtesy made her self-reproachful, she insisted that he come along. They stood crowded together, holding their breath to seem farther apart. A

mean little impulse took possession of her—she would make him feel his lack of taste in amusements.

"I've just come from the Place Vosges," she said. "You really ought to go over and see it—the most romantic spot!"

He was immensely pleased at her enthusiasm.

"Isn't it!" he said. "I love it. I suppose you were at the Hugo house."

There, she had guessed wrong! He was a hard person to diagnose.

"I took it for granted that you were too busy during the day for sight-seeing."

"I am," he said, "but I use Sundays for that sort of thing. You can't tell me much about Paris."

Now he was standing outside the elevator, holding the gate open for her. His own floor was farther up. Really, he had behaved rather well—he hadn't annoyed her once after that rebuke. She made a decision as unexpected to herself as to him.

"Some time next week, if you still wish to take me to the theater, I shall be glad to go."

His face lighted.

"Tuesday will be splendid."

He took her to Ciro's, which she had heard of but would never have visited if he hadn't led her there. Since he hoped to miss nothing of the first act, they were dining a little too early for the crowd, and the place was therefore not so gay as she had half feared and half hoped. Not so different after all from what she would have expected of a restaurant in certain parts of New York, or Boston. An unforeseen link in her thoughts made her ask whether the Copley-Plaza was perhaps like

this. For one unsteady moment she half fancied Mary and Winthrop sitting at the table over there, discussing her essay and falling in love with each other.

"I'm afraid you don't like it," said Rawley. "It's all a matter of personal taste. Some tourists swear by Ciro's, others can't be lured away from Larue's. We'll try that another evening. Now, what show would you care to see? I thought we'd take a chance at tickets and pick the theater we were in the mood for at the last minute. Name your choice!"

She made an effort to be cheerful and at ease.

"Anything but the Moulin Rouge."

"Good," he said. "But if you'll allow me to prescribe for you, I think you ought to see the Folies at least once."

"That's not vulgar, is it?"

"It's a little frank, like everything here, but beautiful."

With the word frank he disarmed her. Even if she didn't enjoy it, she would never have to go again, and it wasn't a bad thing for an author to see—whatever there was at the Folies to see.

When they entered, she was impressed by the long lobby, the vast hall to wander in between the acts, and for the first two or three scenes of the show she was lost in wonder at the scale of the auditorium, the beauty of the decorations. What was happening on the stage she found somewhat confusing—the language impossible to follow, the plot of the entertainment lost in the brilliance of lights and costumes. All at once she felt Rawley nudging her with his elbow.

"Isn't she beautiful? The fifth from the left."

Really, the stage picture was so lovely that she hadn't attended to details, but now she observed with consterna-

tion that the fifth chorus girl from the left, and all the other odd-numbered ones in the front line, had nothing on, not a stitch. She was panic-stricken at the discovery, annoyed at herself for not feeling even more uncomfortable than she did. Furtively she glanced at the men and women in the audience, but could see in their faces only a normal sort of interest in the show. Had she been alone, she told herself, she could have enjoyed the spectacle without wrong thoughts, but Rawley's trick of nudging and whispering was most unpleasant. The man had no reticence whatever. He began to call her attention to anatomical differences between these animated statues. Really, he had an indecent mind. Or perhaps no woman ought to go to such a show in company with a man. She looked at the audience again. That rule had clearly not been followed.

The scene changed, and she began to breathe a little easier. Not even the recurrence of the nude actresses from time to time distressed her greatly. She was getting used to it. But a distrust of Rawley was growing steadily. It rose into a very positive resentment when he insisted on taking her to see the African dancers up-stairs during the intermission.

"I'm sure I oughtn't to go there!" she exclaimed. "I'm not a prude, you know, and those things are all right in their native setting, but in a civilized city like this——"

He had taken hold of her by the arm, and almost pushed her up the stairs.

"Oh, come along, Mrs. Beauvel. They couldn't have a setting more native than this. They're only French girls, just browned up to look African."

Never without shame could she recall that disgusting entertainment. Her face was burning from the moment they entered the small, ill-ventilated gallery. The few short minutes the three women performed on their high narrow stage to the accompaniment of some kind of shrill bagpipe, were for her an age of torture. When she and Rawley went back to their seats she fancied he was enjoying her discomfiture.

"Rotten show, isn't it?" he said. "They all do the same thing, though they pretend to put on different dances. It gets a little monotonous, doesn't it? Just that bit of a stomach wiggle."

For several minutes she declined to speak to him.

By the end of the performance her head was aching with the evening's sensations, and with her troubled thoughts. She had hoped to return at once to the hotel, but he continued to deal with her as masterfully as when he had pushed her up the stairway to the African dancers.

"It just isn't done," he said, "to go back from the theater without stopping at a café. We'll choose a nice quiet one. I suppose you know the Café de la Paix?"

She didn't, and he expressed surprise.

"Another time," she pleaded, but he told the chauffeur to drive them to the boulevard. When she saw how public the institution was, in what a conspicuous location, so well patronized by such bourgeois-looking people, she decided to run the risk.

"I've always understood," she said, "that the nations of the earth come here."

"They do—they're here now."

"But these people all look respectable."

Rawley stared at her.

"Well, the nations of the earth are respectable."

While he was busy telling the waiter what sort of sandwiches to bring with the beer, she spent the moment admiring the long room, white and gold, with its mirrors, and imagining the famous people who through the decades had come there—what literary geniuses, and of course what disreputable folk. She did not object to disreputable people so long as they were imaginary, and when they were historical she really liked them.

When they were half through with their sandwiches she had begun to enjoy herself again, and for the first time Rawley seemed entirely happy. The evening might have ended well, if in a rash moment he had not started to tell her in his explosive and boyish way what a good time he was having.

"I knew you'd like it, if you got started," he said. "It's only the first step that's difficult."

She looked up and saw in his eyes, or thought she saw, that melting look which Carl had given her on the boat, the last night, at that awful moment. She took it as fair warning.

She looked away from him to a young Frenchman and his girl, seated at a table farther along the wall—a keen faced youth, proud of his early mustache, a demure girl, with glints of engaging malice in her large eyes.

Rawley turned to see what Isabel was looking at, and just then the young Frenchman put his arm around the girl's neck, drew her close, and inaugurated a kiss which threatened to be permanent. Isabel felt most uncomfortable, but the Englishman laughed, very much too loud.

"That's the life!"

She looked down—it was time to go.

"What a life!" he repeated. "Or as you say it, 'and how!' Own up, you've enjoyed yourself so far, haven't you? You'll be a wonderful companion yourself, when you're initiated into Paris!"

He had the impudence to lean across the table and give her an encouraging pat on the hand. With sudden dignity she stood up.

"Will you please take me home now?"

He was almost frightened.

"What's the matter?"

"I can't stay. I must go."

He tried to expostulate, but soon learned it was useless. Before he could settle the bill and get his hat and coat, she was at the door waiting for him.

"You're not ill, are you?" he asked with deep concern, as they got into the taxi.

"If you want to know," she said, "I am sick at heart."

"Why?"

Of course if she answered him, he would argue. She wouldn't stoop to discuss it with him. They rode in silence.

"Mrs. Beauvel, I must have done something to offend you. All evening you've been troubled. I hope you believe that I wanted only to give you a pleasant time."

She couldn't resist a comment.

"I suppose that's what you would call it."

"Now, Mrs. Beauvel, what does that sarcasm mean?"

She wouldn't answer, and he bothered her no more until he was bidding her good night at the gate of the elevator.

"Go ahead and say it, Mrs. Beauvel! What have I done?"

Why not be frank and tell him the truth? She looked him straight in the eye.

"It's what you wished to do that hurt me. Don't think I'm so unsophisticated as all that!"

She walked quickly away, but before her head was turned she caught the astonishment in his face. Well, evidently he didn't expect her to have so much spirit. She wished her words to him had been a little more subtle, but from her experience he was evidently not the kind of European you could be subtle with. He had a different method of flirting from Carl's, and needed different treatment. She was thankful for the inspiration to step on him firmly before it was too late. There was always a right way if you really wanted to find it. Mary had no real excuse for letting Winthrop behave like a fool.

III

THE unpleasant incident with young Rawley was her true reason for going to Nice, but the process was so gradual that perhaps she didn't herself know all her motives. He bothered her no more, hardly spoke when they unavoidably met, and for the most part was as willing as she to avoid a meeting. No doubt he was ashamed, perhaps penitent.

Yet she wished she had clearer evidence of his misbehavior. Thinking it over, after the evening was well in the past, she realized that he had proceeded cautiously, without committing himself at any step; there was nothing specific to complain of, except his patting her hand across the table. But had she encouraged him ever so slightly, he would have thrown off the mask.

She delayed long enough to finish her story and send it home. This time she did not select *The Atlantic Monthly,* but a magazine which specialized in fearless accounts of social iniquity, and illustrated its pages so as to provide satisfaction both to reticence and to curiosity. The stories Isabel had hitherto read in it had been over-occupied, she thought, with sex. Her own manuscript might be welcome, she hoped, as presenting the theme for the first time justly, without exaggeration.

She had another subject in her thoughts, waiting to be treated, but her nerves also were craving a rest. She went to Dijon for a week, then to Lyons, then down to Avignon and Arles. Dijon fascinated her—the old

houses, the splendid museum, the sense everywhere of beauty, of seasoned art. And the people you met on the streets were wholesome—cheery, sane folk, not like the world-weary she had seen in Paris. After a preliminary, superficial exploring of the country, she was sure she would return to Dijon some day and settle there for a long while. At the moment, however, it was better to move on. She did not care to tell herself why it was better.

For Lyons she had no such instinctive affection, perhaps because she was growing accustomed to provincial cities and missed what she had found in the first, the charm of surprise; or perhaps because this town is active, and suggests business. Avignon too she was content to pass quickly by, in spite of its history, in spite of affection she expected to have for the troubadours of Provence, once she could give her attention to them in their native region. But she discovered that, even in Avignon, the troubadours were long dead, the courts of love were unconvincing, the old bridge, famous in the song, was unprepossessing out of it, and even the castle of the exiled popes, however formidable, was inadequate to the present needs of her spirit—she would have been as well off if she had never seen it.

Arles pleased her more, not so much because of its arena, nor its Roman theater, nor even because of the quaint house in which the city preserves the record of its old customs and costumes, but because she liked the Hotel du Forum, which the bus man at the train had chosen for her. In the tall ceilings of her bedroom, in the orderly quiet of the house, in the exquisite meals, simply served, she had the first promise of that peace of

soul she believed she was in search of. For a long time, she knew, she would enjoy this shelter; here she would meet no one—she meant, no man—to trouble her life. Young bounders like Rawley had never heard of Arles.

She did stay two weeks. The first Saturday night, a marvelous evening, clear and starry, she spent leaning from the window of her room, drinking in the sound of many deep voices, all talking quietly. She could see the broad black hats, as the men sat around the café tables in the little square and discussed the events of the week. This was France, she told herself—here, not in Paris, the great people were at home; here an old civilization was living on its wisdom, drawing from life the greatest possible enjoyment at the least cost—that is, not merely the least cost in money or labor, but the smallest expense of human suffering. Here, she had no doubt, the husbands and wives were contented with each other. If she had had the time, and if her French had been sufficient, she would have inquired as to that point—she saw the possibility of an interesting article.

This mood of admiration for a kind of life she would have rebelled against at home, grew upon her, a few mornings later, when a funeral passed through the square on its way to the old church. She heard the deep chanting of the priests as they walked in their robes over the cobblestones, before the hearse. These people, she thought, face the realities of life and death, and their religion, after all these centuries, is still of the fabric of daily experience. This dead man is of no special importance to the town, but the men and women who stand by the street side to do him reverence have not forgotten that he illustrates the human fate—they all

later will be carried across the town like this. . . . Her thoughts for the rest of the day were somber, but in spite of that they were poetic thoughts and uplifting—while they occupied her, she could forget the subject matter of her latest story, could even see her own fate in the large, if not Winthrop's, nor Mary's.

Yet Arles too failed, after the fortnight. She went on directly to the Riviera, to Nice. Carl had mentioned the place, but it had been in her thought before she met him. Every one went there, she knew, all writers, and the smart world, and kings and queens incognito. She needed a brilliant city now, since she had learned how quickly she absorbed what the small places had for her; perhaps it was her novelist's imagination, she told herself, which exhausted the charm of famous environments—really she had visited Avignon and Arles long ago, in her reading and day-dreaming.

What she did not tell herself was that she was desperately lonely. She missed some one to talk to, she missed Winthrop at breakfast and dinner, she missed even his stupidities, his reliable denseness. Rawley had been thoroughly vital, but offensive. By contrast Winthrop was everything one could cling to.

She did not yet face her loneliness as a fact, but it was latent in her mood, ready to be faced sooner or later. And she would have been glad to find some one to show her story to, for criticism; that was as far as she went toward a wish to have Mary back. She did wonder whether in Nice she might not meet some one, a woman, of course, who would develop into a companion. If she was to spend her days abroad, it was time she found such a friend.

To give herself every opportunity, she chose the largest hotel described in the guide-book, a vast, and to tell the truth, somewhat gaudy establishment, right on the Mediterranean, where her windows looked out on the Promenade des Anglais. An enormous room, full of light and air, but more expensive than the guide-book had suggested, and inducing a heavier weight of loneliness than she had yet suffered under. Well, she would stay only a few days, study the kind of people who frequented the house, and move on.

Her study was not encouraging—the other guests were of too many varieties for her to classify, and except for several English families, who showed no promise of wishing to meet her, they spoke languages she could not understand. For a brief afternoon she had some hope of the woman in the room next to hers—she had heard her talking in a soft, rather sweet voice. This might turn out to be the friend appointed by destiny, a sympathetic soul-mate. If so, perhaps they could have the door unlocked between the two rooms, and share a sort of apartment. The thought came to her as she was setting out for the tourist office in search of her mail, and as though heaven knew she needed encouragement, there on the top of the small bundle of letters was a note from the magazine, complimenting her on the new story and accepting it. Evidently she could still support herself, she could stay on at the hotel, if the new friendship arose she was free to make the most of it.

Afterward, looking back, she saw that the note did portend something—only she hadn't correctly guessed what. No friendship, however. The woman was leaving her room as Isabel entered hers, and for a moment they

looked at each other, then the woman turned away indifferent. She was a tall, sinewy creature, much too richly dressed, grotesquely over-rouged. Isabel had no doubt her hair was dyed. No, that wouldn't be her destined friend.

But two hours later, when she went down-stairs to dine alone under the brilliant chandeliers, Carl was standing in the hall, waiting for some one. He saw her at once. She would have been glad to escape his eye, for the sight of him hurt her with a sudden pang. He too was embarrassed, she thought. He turned slightly red, then stepped toward her in his courtly fashion, with just that suggestion of tribute in his attention which had pleased her on the boat, before he had betrayed himself.

"Madame Isabel! I had no idea you were in Nice! You spoke of coming, but in Europe it is so easy to change one's plans. How delightful!"

"I'm here for a few days." She would not encourage him.

"And staying here! What a coincidence!"

She grasped the thought that he was in the same hotel. It frightened her.

"I chose the name in the guide-book," she began. "I wanted a large place, with many people in it."

He laughed.

"The world is under this roof, sooner or later. I guessed correctly, Madame Isabel, you are an experienced traveler, you know your Europe. You, being you, could choose only this."

The compliment gave her no pleasure at all, on the contrary. But it wasn't the moment to explain. She smiled and was walking away, when he detained her.

"Will you dine with me to-morrow?"

She hesitated, but could invent no ready excuse.

"Here?"

"Where you will."

"Yes, here. At eight?"

"I shall wait for you, on this spot."

She found herself very nervous, more disturbed by the coincidence than she could see reason for being. Now she would have to leave the hotel, of course—she could not spend her time near a man utterly unprincipled, not even if he was charming. But on the other hand, he had seemed genuinely glad to find her there. Had it not been for his mistake at the end, their trip on the boat would have been a happy memory. And he certainly was the type of man who could get her point of view—he had culture and whatever it was that men like Winthrop lacked. With him, if only he behaved, she could be her true self. Well, she would enjoy one evening before going away, and in that very public dining-room she would be safe. There he could hardly continue his objectionable proposals, and he wasn't a clown, like Rawley, to maul her hand across the table.

Again, as on the boat, she found herself dressing with unusual care for their meeting. She was conscious now of a wish to please him, not the ordinary ambition of a woman to make herself attractive, not the desire, ever so slightly aggressive, which even the most modest woman has, to make an impression, but a defensive wish to justify his notion of her. Of course she wasn't playing a part—that would have been insincere; she was merely taking care of herself in a moment of danger. She had left him believing her a sophisticated person; well, so

she was now, far sadder and wiser than when she had written that article and read it to Mary. Now she knew what life was like. All men were unscrupulous and untrustworthy, but some of them were subtle and because of their trickiness, rather interesting. On one side of her nature she was glad she remained old-fashioned, what Carl would call, no doubt, prudish, but there was no reason for letting him see the reticences he would not appreciate. If he could imagine that she, Isabel Beauvel, who had belonged by birth and training to small American towns like Fairfax, was really a woman of his dubious world, then she had more tact and adroitness than she had been aware of, and it would be well to let him persist in his mistake. So long as he felt a harmony between them, he would disclose his thoughts freely—and if she was bound on an adventure in knowledge, why not accept, for good literary purpose later on, any disclosure of himself which he was rash enough to make? What the women looked like, of the kind he thought she was, she had observed accurately. Her neighbor in the next room, for example.

Yet her hand trembled a little as she applied her lip rouge—her lips had never before worn such a red—and when she looked in the glass, for a final assurance, she felt dimly ashamed, not because of what she saw reflected, but because for the first time she suspected she was deceiving herself. Perhaps she really liked Carl, in spite of what he had said; perhaps in the recesses of her heart she wouldn't be disappointed if he should say something of the kind again. Very well—she would be sincere even now, as she had tried to be before; she would examine herself. Did she like him? Yes, she did!

Did she love him? No, of course not—no good woman could love such a character. Would it give her pleasure now to hear again that sort of thing? Not pleasure, exactly, because he ought not to say it, but . . . she was lonely, and it is a comfort in loneliness to know you are admired, no matter how nor by whom . . . and in any case she could handle him judiciously and turn the subject before it became distressing.

Her frankness with herself put her scruples at ease, and when she met him at the door of the dining-room she was completely poised, ready to enjoy the talk which, she knew well, he would make charming. His greeting was perfect, she thought—the same courtesy as on the boat, the same fineness of tact, the same delicious tone of intellectual comradeship. If she couldn't forget his one mistake, at least she must grant he had the instincts of a very remarkable gentleman—and perhaps she had been ungenerous not to make some allowances for the circumstances of the voyage, that romantic night, and . . . and the proximity. Before they were past the oysters she forgave him.

"I can't get over my luck at finding you," he said. "Europe is such an easy place to lose one's friends in, and you would naturally have so many interests over here. I've often wondered where you were and what you were doing. Writing, of course."

"Yes, I stayed in Paris to finish a story."

"How do you find Paris this season?"

"Delightful—that is, I didn't enjoy it as I had hoped, but it wasn't the fault of the city."

He nodded.

"It always depends a little on the mood, doesn't it?

And they can say what they like, it hasn't recovered yet from the war—the old joy is gone, at least for this generation."

"Well, it isn't surprising, is it?"

"Did you gather material for your novels? Only the other day I was talking with a Hungarian writer, and I thought of you; he was saying that one can't gather material from outside—it comes from within or not at all. What do you think?"

"Oh, I'm sure you can gather it."

Her short story, which owed its importance to her meeting with him, came to mind—evidence she could not cite; on the other hand, there were those novels of hers about the Northwest, and she recalled that Shakespeare wrote of Cleopatra without the advantage of a visit to Egypt.

"I suppose," she said, "it all comes from within, ultimately, but first it has to sink in from the outside."

"Excellent! I'll tell him that. I'm glad you're not one of these egocentrics who overlook the unexplored possibilities of life. Literary truth to-day is unimaginative—the novelists give us nothing but autobiographies."

She wanted to tell him that her eyes were open to the possibilities of life.

"Some of us have more adventures than we can write about, or care to."

She thought he looked as though he did not understand such a statement.

"I mean, if you are alert to what goes on in the world about you, you can see hundreds of possible stories, even if they don't appeal to you personally."

"Ah, yes—of course, and the trained writer like your-

self will notice more of that sort of thing than the rest of us."

"Really, I doubt if you miss any of it."

He smiled.

"I do my humble best."

"In Paris I met an odd sort of man in the hotel—if I had encouraged him ever so little, I might have gathered enough material for several novels."

He smiled more broadly.

"I don't doubt it!"

"He was an Englishman, a frightfully crude person, who pestered me to go to the theater with him. He wanted to show me the real Paris."

"Did you go?"

"Oh, he wore out my resistance at last."

"Then I'll tell you where he took you—to the Folies Bergères."

"Precisely."

He laughed, and without knowing why, she made herself a partner in his mirth.

"Isn't it odd how they think of the Folies, whenever they try to be naughty in Paris? And your American men, on the average, Madame Isabel, are almost as child-like—if you'll forgive me for saying so."

Her anecdote of Rawley had somehow got out of hand; it didn't seem worth while to pursue it further.

"Yes," she said, "from the Continental point of view, our men are childlike."

"Why don't you write up your Englishman? He would make a delightful study in an ironic vein—your vein, I assume. Did you say you finished a story in Paris?"

"Yes—a short one."

"When may I see it? You know, I've read nothing of yours, as yet."

She told him what magazine would publish it, but the name was unfamiliar to him.

"Haven't you a copy with you—the manuscript? Won't you show it to me?"

To him! When she had based it all on his wickedness! At least, in the story it was wickedness.

"It's not much of a masterpiece, I confess. Some day I'll show you one of my better things."

"No, this one, now!"

She pretended to a sudden interest in a woman a few tables away.

"How extraordinary! Do you know who she is?"

He turned to look. The woman had singularly black eyes, and she had lengthened the line of the lashes into an exaggerated shadow toward each ear; at a distance the eyes though wide open seemed half-closed. Her skin was chalky white, and her hair, black as the eyes, was drawn back from her forehead. A black dress, daringly plain, fitted close to her body.

"She's probably an actress, wouldn't you say?"

Carl ended his inspection.

"Perhaps. Certainly a vivid type. . . . But am I to see the story?"

Since at the moment he was clearly interested in nothing else, she promised, thinking he would forget about it. But when they left the dining-room, he insisted.

"Do go get the story, Madame Isabel, and bring a warm coat—there's a quiet corner of the veranda where we can read it without interruption."

So she found herself reading it to him, as though he had been Mary Allerton. Still embarrassed when she began, she gathered confidence quickly, partly because it sounded better than she had hoped, partly because he approved, and let her know he did, with quiet exclamations of delight at bits of dialogue or turns in the plot. She had been correct in believing there was a natural sympathy between their minds; it wasn't merely the sophisticated aspects of the episode which he applauded, he liked also the admirable qualities she had conferred on the heroine. When she had finished, she could not believe an hour had passed—she really had enjoyed herself, the story was a success, she knew he would say it had the European point of view. For a moment he delayed his praise, as though still savoring the pleasure.

"It is what I expected, Madame Isabel. Brava!"

"I hesitated to read, for fear you would find it too—too——"

The right word escaped her, or perhaps the right thought. He supplied the gap.

"Too American? No, that story could have been written only by one who knows life. We European men are like that—you see through us. And how you understand your American sisters!"

From this last remark she could not wring the compliment she would have wished.

"You think I have done her justice?"

"More than justice! You portray her ideals of virtue, indicate their limitations, yet permit us to find them admirable. The type couldn't be better done."

"I wanted to show that with all her limitations, she

could protect herself, or she would be safe, I'd better say, against the man's advances."

She thought Carl must surely guess that when she wrote the story she had been thinking of him, but his answer showed he had missed the point.

"Why," he said, "that's one of the best turns in the whole thing! You indicate that she thought it was her virtue which triumphed, while she really was safe because the man was a gentleman. At first he probably thought she wanted his love as much as he wanted hers, but when he found out that her apparent cordiality was only the result of her ignorance, he left her in peace. At least, that is the way I read the story. Am I correct?"

She ought to have told him then that he entirely misunderstood her and her writings, but it was a little hard to surrender the reputation she had just acquired with him for worldly wisdom; besides, his interpretation of the story was as convincing as any she herself could have given—perhaps it was the right interpretation, perhaps she had written a deeper thing than she had been conscious of, perhaps——

"You are a penetrating reader," she said, "the best kind of audience; you make me believe in my own work."

As she spoke, she wondered what perversity drove her on to seek his compliments at the cost of strict truth, yet the mood she was in permitted her to say nothing else.

"Thank you a thousand times for letting me hear it! May I hope to be your audience again, when the next story is written?"

"But I may not write another for some time."

"I shall try to be patient, Madame Isabel."

There was no more to say. They sat for a while and watched the garden, dim in the starlight, and listened to the motors along the Promenade.

"I think I'll go in now," she said. "Thank you for a delightful evening—for being kind to my story."

He rose quickly, and she reached out her hand, expecting him to kiss it. But he held it firmly and drew her toward him, ever so slightly.

"We ought to take a turn in this wonderful night, before you go in. There's a car here—shall we ride for an hour?"

"Oh, I couldn't! It's late."

"For your American heroine it would be. You are too much lost in your story, you forget this is Nice."

He spoke as though she must see how ridiculous she was.

"I mean, I'm a little tired to-night, and should get to bed."

"Well, then, half an hour—fifteen minutes!"

He still held her hand. And when she considered it, there was no good reason why she should not go—for fifteen minutes.

The car was ready, as he had said, though she was not sure it belonged to him. Perhaps he hired it while at the hotel, or perhaps it was a kind of super-taxi. She couldn't guess.

"To Villefranche!" he said.

His behavior from that point on was impeccable. They rode along the shore, on the road which skirts the cliff, and the Mediterranean lay mysterious beside them. Once or twice he called her attention to some glimpse of loveliness, on land or water; beyond that, he was as

silent as she. She did not have to remind him of the time—he told the driver when to turn back, and at the hotel he apologized for having taken more than the quarter of an hour.

"But you'll sleep better for the drive," he added.

In her room she put the manuscript away in the trunk. What a fine intelligence he had! It wasn't fair to make comparisons, but she asked herself when had Winthrop ever listened to her thoughts with such comprehension, such collaboration? It would be more than agreeable to read Carl her next manuscript—but before it was completed she would probably leave Nice. Undoubtedly she ought to. Or find another hotel. She really couldn't be seen talking to him often, not under the same roof.

The next morning, while busy with the typewriter, she heard the noise of a trunk rolling across the floor of the adjoining room. Though she stifled her curiosity for the moment, she inquired later of the chambermaid, and learned that the woman from whom she had hoped for companionship was leaving. The news gave her a little pang, as though her conscience were suggesting that she heed the omen and go with her. She put the hint aside, and worked vigorously on the new story. Before she went away, she would show it to him.

But when she came up-stairs after lunch, a new guest had moved into the vacated room. The hall boys had just carried in some luggage, and the door was open. In a sudden presentiment, she knew who it was. As she hurried past the door, he was unpacking a bag. He looked up cheerfully.

"Why, Madame Isabel! Is this where you live?"

"Yes." Her throat was quite dry, her voice was husky.

"You don't mean, in the next room?"

"Yes."

"What a strange fortune! Never before have I set up my tent under the shadow, as it were, of genius!"

Not knowing what to say, she laughed, went on into her room, and turned the lock. She could hear him singing to himself, as he unpacked his things. After a while she heard a key in his door, and his footsteps. She never in her life was more annoyed. Nor more lonely.

IV

THAT evening he asked her again to dine with him, but she declined. He was in no obvious way daunted, nor even disappointed. Whatever decision she should make would apparently satisfy him. She dined alone, and he, to her surprise, dined with the vivid type they had noticed the evening before—the very white woman with the very black hair. He came in with her, after Isabel was seated at her table, and he found a place well across the room, where he and the actress could talk, almost secluded.

Isabel was rather exasperated with him. She told herself the bitter feeling was purely impersonal, an intellectual disappointment—she had supposed him too fastidious to find pleasure in the company of such a woman. On the other hand, to be fair, the actress was his second choice, his feeble consolation. He had aimed high enough. Isabel tried not to look at them, nor to guess what they were saying. She hurried through the meal and went to her room. When he unlocked the door next to hers, she was already in bed, waiting vainly for sleep to come. Instinctively she reached out her hand for the light, to see how late the hour was, then stopped herself, for shame. What did it matter to her what he did?

When she met him in the hall, the next afternoon, he greeted her with his usual deference, and with his habitual faith that the understanding between them was perfect.

"To-night, Madame Isabel? At eight? Or will you let me take you somewhere else to dine? You won't be cruel again—I missed you sorely."

So he thought she would dine with him as regularly as on the boat, and if she would not, he'd amuse himself with the actress, and pretend afterward he had been lonely! As she knew him better, how transparent he became!

"You really didn't miss me—you were quite happy—she'll be glad to dine with you again this evening."

Why did she throw her case away? Realizing what she had said, she bit her lip. Now he would know she was annoyed by the other woman—he would think she was in love with him.

"As a matter of fact, Isabel, she *would* dine with me again. She's not so difficult to please as you—or I."

"Are you difficult?"

He smiled.

"I prefer you."

She noticed that he had called her Isabel, without his courtly "Madame." Did her mistake encourage him so quickly? The compliment, about his preference for her, wasn't much, anyway—why shouldn't he prefer her to that bold thing?

"She's very interesting, I'm sure. You'd better invite her again, if you wish——"

"But I don't at all! You are too clever not to know why I asked her last night."

She did not ask him why—he paused a second, then told her.

"You wouldn't dine with me, but gave no reason. I could guess, of course. I knew you had too much spirit

to dine in your room, or go elsewhere; unquestionably you would come down and eat alone. Well, it wouldn't be pleasant for me to eat alone too, and watch you from a separate table. So I got myself introduced to the lady you had picked out for me. Her sole attraction was the knowledge that she had interested you."

His eyes were bright with mischief, or something stronger. She knew he was talking nonsense, and would have left him abruptly, if she had thought of a clever excuse. He had a strange way of saying things, quite in passing, which tantalized.

"You guessed," she said, "why I wouldn't dine with you last night?"

"Yes."

"If you understand my reason, you ought not to ask again."

"But I ought, just because I do understand!"

He seized both her hands and forced her by a will she tried to resist, to look up at him.

"Isabel, you hate to surrender, don't you? I love you for it!"

She was frightened, as she had been on the boat—not so deeply shocked this time, but of course he was saying now nothing so blunt nor so insulting.

"Surrender to what? Don't be absurd!"

He kept looking down into her eyes. Really, he was dangerous; he could, if he wished, exercise hypnotic powers.

"You adorable Puritan!"

The word suggested a way of escape.

"You've discovered at last that I am a Puritan?"

There! She had confessed, she had been sincere!

"I knew it from the first. You have the sophisticated mind, the curiosity and the wisdom, yet the chaste heart. Irresistible! Of course you are a Puritan."

"Yes, Carl, that's what I am."

It seemed to her that in a sense she was dismissing him. Now that he knew her scruples, he would confine his flirting to the actress. If he still held her hands, it was because a brusque parting would be impossible for him—he would be gracious to the end, and she would have to say the word. She tried to summon a cheerful smile and a tone heart-free.

"Really, Carl, I must go."

He made no attempt to detain her. She knew without a backward look that he stood watching her till she reached the staircase and disappeared.

She had intended only to get her mail, if by any chance there should be a letter, but she continued her walk to the end of the day. Her friends at home had forgotten, for the most part, or they were embarrassed to write. Just then she would have been glad of a word from some one who had known her in her less exciting hours. Loneliness, she knew, was partly responsible for her present indecision, her fear of Carl, of herself, of the ridiculous chain of accidents which had put her, ever so little yet to some extent, under the influence of this man. She asked herself once more whether she loved him, and again she was sure she did not. He attracted her, but she had no wish to marry him. The habit of being Winthrop's wife was still strong—though that was over, of course, for ever. If the right man should appear —she wasn't thinking of matrimony as a definite or desirable program, but if the right man showed himself,

she would recognize him by an overwhelming emotion, the kind she had not felt for poor Winthrop. At least, she wouldn't make the mistake of involving her fate once more with that of a man for whom she entertained only cordial friendship.

If Carl began on that subject again, what ought she to say? Well, he probably would bother her no further, now that he knew she was less sophisticated than he had believed. At all events, she would dine that evening in her room. No, he had guessed she would have too much spirit for such headlong flight, and she'd rather not do what he would interpret as cowardice. Besides, he might think she was eating at a restaurant, perhaps with some friends. Why not let him think so? . . . She resolved to go boldly down and dine alone, where he could see her if he wished. She would put on her most reticent gown, the kind she had worn the night Mary came to their house for the last time. He would understand the omen—no use hoping she would concede a single principle.

But when she reached the door of the dining-room, Carl was waiting for her, as though they had promised to meet there. She couldn't believe her eyes. He bowed, kissed her hand, led her to a table already reserved. Unless she wished to start a vulgar quarrel, what could she do?

"We shall be quieter here than we were last night," he said. "I noticed the noise embarrassed you."

He spoke as though he were her accepted lover, or at least her considerate husband.

As soon as the waiter should be out of hearing she would have to protest.

"Carl, I had no engagement to dine with you! You know I had none!"

He interpreted the remark as an affectionate greeting.

"I'm so glad you came anyway, Isabel! Thank you!"

Then he smiled, and she had to laugh at his extraordinary assurance—but her voice sounded unnatural, and she was frightened once more. Underneath the table her knees trembled. That man with his smooth determination might prove a sort of nightmare—something she didn't like and couldn't help—closing in upon her.

"It's no use trying to tease, Carl—we're not children, and I must insist that you consider my wishes."

In an instant he was on his feet. She was conscious that the dining-room was watching.

"Shall I leave you? I would do nothing that you find distasteful!"

"For heaven's sake, sit down quickly! There'll be talk about us!"

With entire composure he seated himself again, and she felt rather foolish. Why had she asked him to stay? If it was wrong for him to be there, she ought to have let him go.

"You are not so considerate as you pretend. You know I enjoy dining with you, but you also understand that if we dine together every night——"

He interrupted.

"People will say we are lovers. Isabel, they will be right."

He was so earnest that she almost believed him, she almost permitted herself the little thrill of pleasure any woman feels at a proposal, even though she doesn't want the man. Carl certainly was in love with her—she could

read it in his eyes, in his voice, in his entire behavior since they had met. For one unfortunate moment—she was always recalling the episode—he had permitted his emotions to run away with him, but in a sense even that was a compliment. And of course, if he wanted to marry her——

But she really knew him but slightly, and though in theory she was emancipated, in law she was still Winthrop's wife. And if this man should get the idea, at the very beginning, that he could dominate his woman in the European fashion, dictate her tastes, decide for her what she should do——

"We are not lovers, Carl—just good friends."

"Lovers, Isabel! You are too clever not to know it. Such a woman as you ought to scorn self-deception. When a man and a woman arrive at the point of friendship, as you call it, where they are a little afraid of each other and resort to maneuvers, they are lovers. How far they've gone in demonstrating their passion doesn't matter; nature knows they are caught. Wise people admit it and give up the struggle."

"But there isn't a struggle! You presume outrageously!"

He looked, not penitent, but a little hurt.

"I beg your pardon then. But you do yourself less than justice to use phrases which mean nothing to you, and nothing to me. For any man to love any woman is an outrageous presumption, yet it does happen, and the world survives."

He waited for her to answer, but she couldn't; she was too profoundly disturbed by the earnestness of his manner and by this conviction of his that they had come

to some kind of agreement. Perhaps he was not altogether sane. What did she really know about him?

"If you don't mind, Carl, I'd rather not argue. Please don't speak this way again."

"Why not, Isabel?"

"I needn't tell you—all these words will leave us just where we were before."

He wasn't discouraged—in fact, she imagined a sudden gleam of pleasure in his eyes.

"Quite right, as usual, Isabel. It is too late to talk. We were beyond words long ago."

There, he couldn't be entirely sane—or perhaps he said things at random, to hide his embarrassment. She had to admit he always took her rebuffs in excellent temper.

The rest of the dinner talk was a failure, so far as she was concerned. To the end he maintained his cheerful, courtly mood, suggested interesting subjects, tried to lure her into discussions of European books, of French modern art, sought her opinion of Italy's future under Mussolini and afterward, gave his own views of Russia and the East. A gallant effort, for which she admired him, but she couldn't respond; she wanted to escape to her room, get away from him, collect her disarranged emotions. He proposed a visit to one of the casinos or a ride in his car along the coast, perhaps to Monte Carlo, but she excused herself firmly, and he accepted her will. When he bent to kiss her hand as she left him, she smiled more cordially than she would have thought wise, if there had been time for caution, but at the moment her impulse was to be gentle with the man she had rejected.

It was too early for sleep. In her room she put on a comfortable wrapper, selected a book, stretched herself on the bed and tried to read. The book proved totally dull. She went to the writing table and found some of the hotel paper. What she needed was a note-book, a diary; a writer like herself could not afford to forget the details of her experiences. To-morrow she would buy a convenient journal, and begin to set down the portrait of this exciting world. Meanwhile she would sketch an observation or two on the letter sheet, and copy them later into the permanent record.

She drew a line across the top of the page, then sat motionless, looking at it. Her immediate purpose had been to analyze Carl's character, but she couldn't. There was really nothing to take hold of. His sophistication, his blasé philosophy—in a word, his immorality—that was what she expected to set down, lest in the crowd of later adventures she might forget. But as a matter of fact his conduct, always with that one exception, had been beyond reproach. Even his running off with her for dinner was a harmless piece of impudence, if she conceded that he was in love. Her prejudice against him rested on nothing but instinct. She wished she didn't have it.

Since it was impossible to write, she sat gazing at the page, thinking—an odd subject, she confessed to herself—thinking of Winthrop. He had been her first suitor, no one else had ever made love to her until Carl had tried it. She hadn't felt that she had been neglected, or that life had cheated her—in her girlhood she had believed that one true mate was somewhere waiting, destined to present himself at the proper hour, and to

receive attention from another man would be disloyalty in advance. When Winthrop proposed, she knew he was the appointed mate. Hitherto she had rather liked his way of proposing; he had been utterly bashful and incompetent about it, until his long-summoned courage came all at once, on the way home from the lecture course at the Town Hall, and he had stopped in the shadow between two electric lights to whisper, "Isabel, how about our getting married?" They thought then that they understood each other. Now Carl said she understood him, and she was afraid she did. But how elaborate and indirect he was in comparison with Winthrop! Yet—if only she *could* love him, wouldn't the indirectness be rather delightful, the long-drawn-out etiquette by which he thought one should approach the best things in life?

By a sudden, inconsistent twist of her heart, she realized that she was homesick, that she wanted to see Winthrop. Oh, yes, she was through with him, but she'd be glad to watch what he was doing, just to feel his presence for a moment. Since leaving Fairfax, she had heard nothing, but of course there couldn't be exchange of letters. He was out of her life. She rose from the writing table and went to bed. When she fell asleep she was reminding herself that Mary and Winthrop were unpardonable, particularly Mary, and she had done the best for them all by coming away.

She was awakened by the sound of her own name, called softly. For a moment she couldn't remember where she was. Then she saw a door open, and a faint light through it, but she didn't recognize the room.

"Isabel!"

The voice was at her side, sounding almost in her

ear. When she threw off the bed clothes and started up, his arms were around her.

"Let me go, Carl! I'll scream!"

His kisses silenced her. She struggled to push his face away, but he held her elbows.

"Please!" she tried to say, but even if her lips had been quite free, she would not have had the strength. She felt herself sinking. He laid her head back gently on the pillow. If she opened her eyes, she knew she would look into his.

So this was what he meant—had intended to do, perhaps, all along—perhaps had bribed the hotel people to let him have that room next hers, and to give him the key to the door between them! She grasped it all, yet wasn't nearly so angry as she had been on more innocent occasions; she wanted to be angry now, but it was impossible, under his caressing hands. Ruffian that he was, that he had proved himself at last, he yet behaved as she never would have expected of a brute, he had a delicious way of being cruel, he was exploring every exquisite nerve in her body, his fingers lighter than a breath.

And afterward he persuaded her to forgive him. It was the crown of his conquest. He knelt beside the bed, as though he prayed to his saint.

"You ask me why I dared? Isabel, I love you! I have no other excuse, but love needs none. No, I am not ashamed, I am proud! . . . The door? How do I know how it opened? If there had been no key, I would have broken through. Had there been no door, I would have thrown down the wall!"

Really, he was quite magnificent, and aside from the

hyperboles inevitable to the emotion under which he had recently labored, his pleading was simple and sincere. What could she say? It was as he had told her, too late now for words. He remained at her side and comforted her until her nerves were composed, or fairly so, and when he returned to his room he left the door slightly ajar—a homelike concern for her welfare which she found pleasing. It was almost dawn before she slept.

His footsteps in the next room roused her.

"Don't get up," he said. "Stay in bed and rest. I'll close the door, then you call for your breakfast and I'll order mine. I'll bring the tray into your room and we can talk."

As he spoke he was coming toward her, and now he stooped down and kissed her—worshiped her, rather. She had nothing to regret, since he loved her with all his heart. She had not guessed that such love as his could be found in the world—so resolute, so daring, so exquisite in its intuitions, so unerring in its art. She wasn't yet quite sure she loved him, but she knew beyond a doubt he was the man she ought to love.

So she had her breakfast in bed, propped up on the pillows, and he brought the writing table near her, and drew up a chair.

"Isabel dearest—you entirely forgive me?"

She smiled.

"I shan't say you are above reproach, but we can let the past be past—it's the future that's interesting."

"Good! That's your wise self speaking!"

He was happy as a boy. To be eating his breakfast beside her, in her bedroom—he evidently was enjoying every aspect of the privilege.

"You know, Carl, I have a husband in America. When I left him, we neglected to get a divorce, I suppose because I didn't expect to marry again."

He understood perfectly, as usual.

"They're a nuisance, divorces—the publicity, and all that!"

"Exactly. But now that I have a reason, I shall set about divorcing Winthrop at once. He probably won't like to know that I'm to marry you—he didn't want me to go, in the first place—but he's essentially decent, he won't make trouble."

Carl was busy cracking the shell of an egg. He had an amazing skill in persuading the shell to break in an even line.

"You can get a divorce from here, just by sending home for it?"

"I think so. I don't know the details, but Winthrop will find a lawyer, or I will."

"Oh, it certainly can be arranged. Anything can in this world, if one takes the necessary steps."

"What worries me, Carl, is the time we shall have to wait. I don't know how many months, perhaps a year."

He was surprised.

"Why does that worry you?"

"After what we've done——"

He guessed her thought completely, and lifted her hand to his lips.

"Isabel, my woman, my adorable! Are we not, in every true sense, already married, in spirit as well as body? Let the divorce take its time. Our love has its eternity."

V

THE first month of the eternity was an ideal honeymoon. She did not know which to admire more, his unwearying ardor, his unfailing tenderness, or his discretion. She found her mind playing queer tricks all by way of admiration; remembering the virtues she had attributed to the heroes of her early novels, she wished she had known Carl then, that she might have put in something worth while. Who without meeting him could have foretold there was such a man?

Behind the closed doors of their two rooms he was her lover, the worshiper of her body and, what was of course much more important, of her mind. And even if the kisses or exchange of ideas should lapse for a minute, he overflowed with spontaneous delight in their romance, not as though it were, what most romances perhaps seem, a happy illustration of famous legend, but as though it were an adventure first made possible to them, original and innocent as Eden. Worldly wise though he was, their love had released in him the principle of youth. She enjoyed the feeling of being in some respects older than he.

In public, however, he preserved that courtly manner which had always appealed to her. Their transports were not for common eyes. So far as his behavior was concerned, their relations must have seemed to the other inmates at the hotel that of polite admirer and admired. In the States she had once met her publisher face to

face, and he had behaved that way, with consideration and respect, but nothing excessive. Yet in spite of this reticence Carl managed invariably to convey the reassuring news that the flame was only slumbering, and would burst out again as soon as they were alone. No woman ever had such a husband, she whispered to him one night.

"Such a lover, Isabel."

"Husband and lover both," she corrected. "That's the miracle. I think we shall always remain lovers. The fact that we shall be legally married some day won't make the slightest difference."

"None at all," he agreed. "The main thing is love. So long as that lasts——"

"Ours is eternal."

"That certainly is its quality."

At this point his kisses interrupted their lyric communion. Afterward she pursued her thoughts.

"And you are so considerate of me, Carl, in certain outward matters, which only a sensitive woman appreciates."

"Why not a sensitive man?"

"I don't believe there are any, except you. You don't embarrass me in public with uncontrolled emotions. My poor husband, when we were engaged, was always trying to squeeze my hand under the table in restaurants, and if we found ourselves across the room in some company, he would overwhelm me with an adoring look. It makes a woman feel ridiculous."

"Why, if she knows she deserves it?"

"But you don't do that sort of thing, Carl. I can see the adoration in your eyes, but the sight is for me alone."

He shrugged his shoulders ever so little. At least she felt him trying to shrug them, though his arms were around her. It struck her as a false note, the first she had detected.

"Don't you think such aspects of behavior," he asked, "are matters of temperament? In public it's natural for me to be formal. Alone with you—I can be nothing but what I am."

She loved to hear him say it. He was what he was, and she was what she ought to have been long ago—she was herself.

"Isabel, if ever that outward behavior of mine is not sufficiently considerate of you, tell me. Or if in some exceptional mood, you wish it less formal than you are now praising it for being, tell me that too."

"Carl dear, the only criticism that ever occurs to me is that I may be engrossing too much of your time."

He laughed outright.

"No, I mean it. I know something of married life, the daily round is what is difficult. Just now, of course, we wish to be together every minute, but there'll come a time when you'd like to lunch with some friend, or pursue some other interest by yourself, and you'll be reluctant to break the news, for fear I might take it as a failing of love. Give me the opportunity to be considerate too. Even in our love you are entirely free."

He kissed her hand—so much more delicate a tribute at that instant than a kiss directed elsewhere. It was his chivalrous response to her chivalrous gesture.

"The same thing is true of you, of course," he said. "You have your friends, and you mustn't drop them because of me. Whenever you wish to make a separate

engagement, don't hesitate—make it. I shall always understand."

She might have left well enough alone, since the exchange of ideas had been perfect, but generosity in the abstract goes easily to one's head. She was intoxicated with her own largeness of spirit.

"Carl, why don't you lunch with the vivid actress?"

That time she startled him. He looked at her in doubt.

"But on the other hand, Isabel, why *should* I lunch with her?"

"You dined with her once."

He clasped her to his heart.

"Adorable!" he whispered. "You have this resemblance to all the others."

"What resemblance?"

"Jealousy."

She pushed him away and pretended annoyance.

"There isn't a jealous strain in my nature! If you should cease to love me, that would be the end, whether or not some one else was involved. Of course, our love isn't the kind that ends—we shall always love each other. There will be no cause for jealousy, even if I had that sort of nature."

"I still don't see, Isabel, why you ask me to dine with the actress."

"Lunch with her," corrected Isabel. "Perhaps I wish to show what trust I have in you."

"You mean, you count on me not to lunch with her?"

"Now don't pretend to misunderstand! I meant simply that I didn't wish our love to be a prison to any of your proper interests."

"Very well," he said, "to please you I'll lunch with her some day."

The words fell on her ear cold, boding, heartless. Just what was wrong with them she couldn't have said, but she would have preferred to continue an indefinite discussion of their mutual liberality rather than have him agree to put any of it into practise. She decided not to mention the actress again. . . . And with the passing of each day it seemed that Carl would have no occasion to recall that creature. Whether she was still at the hotel Isabel was not sure. She no longer appeared in the dining-room.

But one side of their conversation did remain in Carl's thought. From time to time he suggested that Isabel ought to resume the personal freedom to which even a wife is entitled. He did not again suggest that she look up her friends, having guessed that she knew no one except himself, but he did tell her that her neglect of the writing was on his conscience.

"Your art, Isabel, is more important than any lover."

"How can that be?" She smiled up at him.

"It was in your heart first," he said. "It will be there after all the lovers are gone."

"All the lovers, Carl? What are you saying?"

"I was sparing my own feelings," he said. "What I meant was that the art will be there long after you have learned that I am less than you believe."

The humble turn of the phrase pleased her. What a genius he had for intimating an exalted worship!

But perhaps he was right that the stories should be resumed. In fact, it would soon be quite necessary. The practical aspect of their coming marriage they had not

discussed. Carl was evidently well off, but whether he was prepared to support a wife on the American scale, she had no idea, and in any event it wasn't her intention to be dependent again on any man. For her self-respect, her work must go on, and of course, if you are a born writer, you can't be happy unless you write. Perhaps that was what in his astounding intuition he had guessed about her. He was afraid that their love might unintentionally thwart her inner life.

So she began to save at least two hours every morning for her typewriter, the hours before lunch, and sometimes an hour in the afternoon. He never failed to ask what she had accomplished, or to insist on reading it, and the knowledge that he was her audience made her eager to produce something stark and clear, something closer to the facts of life than she had yet cared to come. She found herself attributing to her men and women less idealism and more impulse. The emotion she now tried to arouse in the reader was no longer unqualified admiration, but rather an amused pity at the forces which made human beings behave as they do—the forces, that is, which compel every human being except the author and the reader. Her Olympian manner, the implied understanding of all things, which of course the reader would share, had the effect of setting them very pleasantly upon a height of detachment above their unlucky fellows.

In matters more specific than this general influence Carl proved an unexpected aid to composition. He knew an extraordinary amount about life, and in the easiest way imaginable he suggested to her here and there what the character in that situation would do, say or feel. The stories came on fast. In a fortnight she sent off two

of them to America. After they had gone, she did wonder a little whether they were too bold, and what her old friends would say when they appeared. Each of them, for example, had a dramatic love scene, and under the realistic influence of Carl and her rapidly acquired faculty for being sincere, she had put down some details which now she wished she had left to the imagination. How a woman feels in the arms of a great lover, she could now describe, and in the stories she had done so. She wished she had reserved part of it for a sacred memory. And once when she had been trying to imagine the emotions of the man, Carl had said something which helped immensely. Of course she didn't wish he had withheld the information, but perhaps it would have been finer of her not to tell on him. For a little while she kept these doubts to herself, then because she wished nothing to be secret between them, she confessed to him. Besides, she was not unwilling that he should know how sensitive she was. But he disposed of her scruples quickly.

"Isabel, it's the first time I've seen you quite forget our philosophy. I adore the reticence, but I am amused at your fear that any reader on earth would recognize in what you have written a picture of any experience but his own. How you under-estimate your art! You know as well as I do that the one good reason for describing these emotions in woman and man is that they are shared by all the race. Were they peculiar to you and me, it would be sacrilege to whisper them."

His words suggested a terror.

"You don't think our love is just like any other love?"

"Exactly like any other love, dear Isabel, except that you are you, and I am I. We have our own way of taking it, but there is nothing original about the thing we take."

"Carl, that makes me feel terribly common!"

He smiled.

"Why not universal? Or eternal? Or some other word vast enough for what we find ourselves caught up in?"

Afterward she knew it had been their most illuminating conversation, but at the moment it depressed her. The idea of belonging to the universe was less attractive than the thought that she belonged to Carl, and if he belonged to the universe, it was disturbing to consider how many women the universe contained besides Isabel. But the subject did not recur, and the universe showed for a while no disposition to interfere with their beatitude.

Toward the end of the month they were eating breakfast as usual in her room.

"I ought soon to hear from my husband about the divorce."

"Yes?"

"I should think he might have written more promptly, but perhaps he was away when my letter came."

Carl was sympathetic but not excited.

"He must be rather a good sort, Isabel, to arrange the divorce for you. You are sure he will?"

"Oh, yes, I can count on him for that."

Her own words gave her a pang. Yes, she could count on Winthrop. Uninteresting as he was, and deeply as he had wronged her, she knew she could count on

him. It was annoying, the sturdiness of some of his virtues.

"Well, as I told you before, Isabel, from my point of view there's no reason for haste, and nothing to worry about. The essential happiness we have, and the formalities can take their natural course."

"Carl, I should think you'd be just a little eager to know I was really your wife."

She could see the adoration in his eyes.

"I *was* eager," he said. "Now that you are my wife, the thought intoxicates me."

"But I mean the legal ceremony."

"And I don't! There, for a woman in love you made an error in compliment. The first rule for dialogue between lovers, Isabel, is that the praise should be given to the real things. Divorce and legal marriage are concessions to law and order. You know as well as I, they have nothing to do with love."

"Of course, Carl, but wouldn't you like to think that I belonged absolutely to you?"

"Don't you? I thought you did."

"Now don't tease!"

"Isabel, do you wish to make sure that I belong absolutely to you? The correct answer is that you thought I did."

Because he was laughing at her, she ended the talk, but the discussion continued in her thoughts and made her restless. Perhaps it was this restlessness which suggested to her the program of the day.

"I shall try to write a good deal this morning, and I'm not sure when I shall be ready to lunch."

"Do you want me out of the way?"

"I was thinking I might stay in my room and have a sandwich or a salad sent up."

"Good. Whatever is best for the writing. I'll amuse myself until the middle of the afternoon. How about a ride at four?"

"Oh, earlier than that, Carl. I shan't be all day. I'll look for you at three."

"At three, then."

That morning she started her new story, and the first pages went rather well, as first pages often do. She had hit on a plot which would illustrate this universality of experience which Carl had talked about, but she would give it her own peculiar turn. There was to be a hero, or a heroine, who found himself in exactly the same situation on repeated occasions. Amorous situations, of course, to be portrayed with delicacy, but also with sufficient clearness to indicate that what the lovers did was an absolute duplicate, even down to the number of kisses and the kinds of caress, of the earlier adventures. And yet the effect of each experience would be, for the hero or heroine, entirely different. The reason she had thought of a hero was that it seemed more modest, since she who wrote the story was a woman. Her readers would know that the plot was purely imaginative. On the other hand, perhaps it would be more modest to make the chief character a heroine. . . . She decided on the heroine. Another advantage besides the modesty would be that she wouldn't have to rely on Carl for the personal experiences. Her heroine of course would be a very fine woman, who in each case thought she was sincerely in love. Her fineness could be indicated by the range of interpretation which she gave to this repeated experience.

The suggestion for this story was partly literary. She had just been reading at Carl's suggestion Rostand's unfinished fantasy on Don Juan, in which the poet makes the famous reprobate meet at the gate of heaven the thousand and one women he had embraced. He learns that his soul will be saved if he can tell one of these women from the other. Unfortunately he can not. When Carl was referring to the fantasy, he suggested that the trouble was not with the number of women but with Don Juan, who had lacked discrimination in his emotions. This remark of his had suggested to her the story.

She wrote with such absorption that before she was aware, it was noon. At that moment the sandwich and the salad were not very appealing. She would do one or two pages more and be through for the day. But after the one or two pages, she grew a little faint with hunger—good, honest, old-fashioned hunger which needed no apologies and was susceptible of no spiritual interpretation. If Carl had been there, they would have had a jolly time together. Too bad she had chosen that day to send him off. Well, she could lunch alone. Or perhaps he was down-stairs at that very moment, wishing for her.

She put together the typed pages and went to the dining-room with them in her hand. He would want to see what she had done, of course, and they could look over the work on the veranda after lunch. But he wasn't in the dining-room, and she used the pages in her hand as a sort of excuse to return to her room. It would be better for the people there to think she had been looking for him, not that she had come to eat. If she ate alone

in that place, wouldn't the disagreeable ones remark on his absence?

She left the pages on her table, put on her hat and went out to find some quiet restaurant near by. It made no difference to her which, so long as it wasn't too near the hotel. She walked down the promenade to the right, then turned sharply toward the center of the town. In the Place Masséna she found the refuge she needed, the Restaurant Riviera, a substantial, old-fashioned establishment, at the moment not crowded with patrons.

As she entered the door the head waiter bowed and motioned at once to a table for two, as though in that place he was accustomed to entertaining unescorted ladies. An absurd impulse stirred in her to explain that her husband was away only for that meal. Was it absurd to have such an impulse? Very well then, she was absurd. It amused her to realize how little she had become a part of this European world. With her mind she understood it, but to her heart it would always be alien. Her moral system, she thanked heaven, remained rooted in Fairfax.

The waiter laid the card before her. Really, literary effort produces an extraordinary appetite. A salad would not be sufficient to-day. She would have a Châteaubriand, and afterward with her coffee, Roquefort and crackers. And yes, a *grave supérieur*. She leaned back in a mood of peace.

Across the room from her, Carl was lunching with the vivid actress.

She tried to get through with the meal quickly, and leave before they saw her. No food was ever cooked so slowly as that Château, nor gave so little satisfaction when it was brought. She left the wine untasted, and

choked on the coffee. When she rose to go, she permitted herself one glance in their direction. Carl and the woman were watching her. His face broke into a happy smile, and he waved his hand as though to greet an old acquaintance. She tried to smile back. Why hadn't he come over to speak, if he had seen her there alone? And why didn't he introduce his friend? When she left the restaurant her knees were too weak for walking. She hailed a taxi. In her room she had just energy enough to remove her hat before she threw herself down on the bed.

Promptly at three he came in, not a minute late, not a second early.

"For God's sake, Isabel!" he began.

She didn't look up at him. He came over and sat beside her, and lifted her face toward his.

"Darling," he said, "are you ill?"

She meant, of course, to be quite proud and self-controlled, but the kindness of his tone undermined her resolution. She clung to his shoulder and sobbed, while he patted her on the back, as though comforting a hurt child. After a while the sobs came to an end.

"Now tell me, Isabel, what's wrong?"

"Don't you know?"

"Of course I don't."

"Carl! When I went there to eat alone I—I—caught you—with that—that woman!"

His manner indicated indignation of the most righteous sort.

"Caught me, Isabel? You suggested that I go out to lunch."

"But not with her."

"I beg your pardon, my darling, I thought that was your precise request, that I should lunch with her."

He made her feel very foolish.

"How ridiculous, Carl! You knew what I meant!"

He smiled at her, as he shook his head.

"Evidently I did not. But tell me now what you meant, and I shall have the pleasure of obeying your wishes."

"Why, I meant——"

Just what did she mean? She wasn't sure. For a long moment he made no effort to help her out. He was revengeful enough to let her flounder in embarrassment. At last he took her in his arms and gave her a good hug.

"Adorable! I will tell you what you mean, from this moment on—when you advise me to lunch with any given woman, you mean she is the last woman on earth I must lunch with. Now that I understand, I shall lunch no more with any created female except you."

She didn't mind the playful tone, since his kisses were tender and comforting, and since he did not rebuke her for foolish jealousy. The more she thought of the episode, the more deeply she was ashamed of herself.

For a week after that encounter her happiness was at its peak. The story was finished, and he had been pleased to find that she had built upon his hint. He had a way of praising her which was not condescending. Even though he called her his adorable Puritan, he still assumed that she was drawing on her own wisdom of life. In a moment of gratitude she spoke to him of Winthrop, not unkindly but with the emphasis rather on the present end of the comparison, on Carl's natural instinct for collaborating with her.

"Our whole love," she said, "will be a collaboration, a true partnership. It wasn't his fault that our interests were separate, it was just our misfortune, perhaps I ought to call it the mistake we both made."

Later in the day on which she said these words, Winthrop's letter reached her, his answer to her request for a divorce. His familiar handwriting was on the envelope. Her fingers trembled as she tore open the paper. She wondered if her thought of him in her conversation with Carl had been the effect of some kind of telepathy. Here he was back in her life again, reviving old emotions, such as she had felt when he had first written to her long ago. His neat handwriting, the careful margins, his little trick of crossing *t's*—she wished he had sent the letter typewritten.

But these vague and disturbing impressions were forgotten as she began to read. The letter was dated not from Fairfax, but from Harrington, a place she had never heard of.

Dear Isabel: I might answer your request in several ways. Little as I know about divorces, I could suggest at least three methods of securing the release you ask for. I shan't waste your time or my own by disputing your entire right to this freedom. You tell me you have found the man you truly love, the one fate intended you to meet. I could reply with all sincerity that this news makes me happy for your sake, if such words from me might not sound to you lacking in affection.

But instead of sending you the information you ask for, I am going to implore you not to ask for it. You will think me selfish and I shall agree with you, but the

fact is that for you to divorce me now, at this moment in my life, would ruin me. Mary and I did not love each other, as we told you, but your going away forced us, through a chain of circumstances neither you nor we foresaw, to share the same home. In order to save your reputation and hers, as well as my own, I left Fairfax and came here to begin life again. The people here believe we are husband and wife. If you brought a suit for divorce now, you would take away Mary's reputation and rob her of friends whom she sorely needs. I should blame myself for having deeply wronged her twice.

Isabel, she and I are trying to lead good lives, and by service to our neighbors to repair whatever wrong we did to you and to ourselves. I didn't wish you to leave me. You remember I asked you, even if you did wish to go, to stay a while first, and to make our separation depend on something else besides that incident. You said then that you'd never wish a divorce unless I did. I appeal to your sense of fairness not to change your plan now.

Isabel read the letter twice.

They were living together, then, in a strange town. He said "sharing the same house." What did that mean but one thing? And she was calling herself Mrs. Beauvel. Isabel had a strong urge to take the first boat home and have them arrested. Her fit of anger terrified her. She had not known that she could be shattered by feelings so strong—she who had pretended to a philosophic view of her relation to Winthrop and had been busy acquiring the European wisdom.

No, she told herself, she wasn't jealous, she was only rightfully indignant. The trouble with Winthrop and

Mary was that they were still shamming, trying to be good by hiding something. The bad results of that way of life were obvious enough. It had made them so selfish that Winthrop couldn't see what a plight she was in with Carl. Just to preserve his insignificant reputation in Harrington, wherever that place might be, he was willing to sacrifice the rest of her life. Well, she wouldn't put up with it. She would send him a cable.

The cable, of course, might have gone from the hotel, but she feared that by some bad accident Carl would know of it. Better go down to one of the travel bureaus in the town. Carl mustn't know about the letter, either. She had told him confidently that the divorce could be secured for the asking, and it would humiliate her to confess this unexpected difficulty.

She found her way, still half-dazed, to the nearest Cook's, and there stood with the cable blank before her and with the pencil poised. What should she say? It was the advantage of speed which had suggested the cable, but it was a dreadfully public form for the argument which she felt she must make. She wanted to tell Winthrop he had no rights whatever in the matter. He might describe his conduct as he wished, but in plain terms he had committed adultery, and in any state of the Union she could have her freedom for the asking. She tried to reduce this condemnation to an economical sentence, but the sting which she wished to convey was bound up with the word adultery. She would have to offer the cable to that nice-looking man across the desk. . . . She tore up her attempts at a message and reached for a fresh blank.

Perhaps it would be better, more generous on her

part, not to raise that question. The real ground for any divorce, after all, is incompatibility. If it weren't for that cause, nothing else would ever happen. She would cable Winthrop, then, that she and he were incompatible. But good heavens, it wasn't worth the cost of the message! They both knew that long ago. . . . She tore up her second attempt.

In some places, she had always understood, you could get a divorce for desertion. That ground wouldn't be so philosophical as incompatibility, but it was less embarrassing to put into a cable than adultery. She would tell Winthrop that since he had deserted her, she insisted on being legally free. . . . The cable was almost formulated before she remembered that it was she who had gone away. Really, it might be awkward to explain to a lawyer in what respect Winthrop had wronged her—that is, if she left Mary out of it. . . . There was no escaping it, the real ground of their quarrel was Winthrop's adultery. . . . How ghastly! It came over her what Winthrop might think of these weeks she had been living with Carl. Winthrop's case and hers were now exactly parallel. Or perhaps a severe judge might say that hers was worse, for Winthrop and Mary had begged her to let them recover their moral stability, and now Winthrop could write—with what justice she of course couldn't know, but at least he could write it—that her going away had forced Mary and him to share the same home and to assume a married name. She, Isabel Beauvel, was now living outside the law, and she herself had abandoned her husband.

She turned away from the cable desk and walked out toward the sea. Just at that moment she felt a room

would be suffocating. She needed air, and solitude, and some comfort from nature, if she was not to go crazy. Until she recovered herself, she could not face Carl. His keen instinct would know at once that she was troubled; she would have to tell him all, and perhaps he would think less of her. She couldn't bear that.

Because the promenade was too crowded, and walking anyway was impossible for her broken nerves, she found a taxi and drove along the coast in the direction Carl had taken, their first night together in Nice. But the ride now brought no peace nor strength. She would go back to her room, and perhaps if she turned in and pretended a headache, she could escape an awkward dinner and difficult conversation.

Before she went up-stairs she wrote a note to him and asked the clerk at the desk to send it to his room, or to let him have it when he came in. The clerk was under the impression that Carl was somewhere about the house, and could be found at once, if Isabel wished. But she didn't wish. There was no hurry, she said.

When the elevator stopped, she got out, still filled with her troubled thoughts. She walked down the corridor to the door of her room, and tried to open it. The key didn't fit. For a second the mystery was too great for her. It seemed as though she were the victim of a plot. Who had tampered with her lock? But then she noticed the number on the door. The elevator boy had taken her two floors above hers. She laughed to herself with relief at finding so simple an explanation. It wasn't worth while to call back the car; she could walk down.

To reach the stairway she must make her way to the other side of the house. She had come to the end of the

hall, and her hand was on the railing to go down, when she saw at the foot of the staircase a door open, and a man coming out from one of the rooms. He was whispering a farewell to a tall woman with very white skin and very black hair. She wore a pink negligée, exquisite and provoking. The man turned and held her for a second in an intense kiss. Instinctively Isabel drew back, out of respect to their privacy. Neither the woman nor the man saw her, but when he turned and sauntered toward the elevator, she recognized Carl.

The headache of which her note had spoken was now no fiction. As she tossed on her bed in agony, wishing for the day to end, her chief fear was that he might come in to express his sympathy, and she would have to play a false part or else accuse him of what she had seen. If only she could be alone till her mind began to work once more! If he did come it might even be that his tender ways would make her forget a little. He might persuade her again that he loved her, or what was worse, he might convince her that she still loved him.

But he did not come. In the letter, of course, she had asked him not to—she had been almost emphatic in her request·that he be patient with her illness and leave her in peace. Ordinarily, she knew, he would have taken such a request as a special occasion for solicitude, but now he did what she had asked, and stayed away. Just before dinner time she heard him come in, and she listened in the silence to what she thought was the sound of the envelope opening. Now he would be reading her letter. For a long moment she heard nothing, then deliberate footsteps. Was he moving toward her door? No, he had opened his dresser and was taking out his dinner things.

She followed every sound he made as he prepared for the evening, until at last she heard him lock his door and walk off into the distance. It was what she had wished for, yet he disappointed her.

Of course she knew she could have no sleep that night. For what seemed an interminable age she lay there in agony, thinking of Winthrop and of Carl, and of all human baseness. She could get no further than a mere telling over of the facts; there was nothing for reason or logic to operate on, and no outcome of wisdom, no plan for the future. Afterward she remembered her concluding thought, that this might be life or it might be insanity, and that the difference was slight. When she woke up it was still dark, but through the drawn curtains of her room she could see day beginning. Another day, she realized, would be unwelcome, and there would be many days. She turned over and tried to sleep again. Somewhere in the hall sounded a thud or two, a muffled bump, as though some one were dragging a trunk, and trying not to wake the house. How dreadful to have to catch a train at such an hour! She was glad of the comfort of the soft bed to her tired body.

In the morning she dressed promptly, without waiting for her breakfast. She wished to meet Carl in full armor, prepared for austere battle, not in the defenseless posture in which his tenderness might have an effect. She rang for her breakfast. When her maid brought it, she fancied the girl looked at her with a kind of pity. Odd, what tricks the mind can play! No doubt every one in Nice from that moment would seem to be aware of her tragedy. She finished the breakfast alone, and waited for Carl to knock on the door, and begin his defense,

but when he postponed that crisis, she became impatient. Perhaps he was seeking refuge in a quarrel. Perhaps he would pretend a grievance in her request for him to stay away. She would have it out with him now.

When the maid came back for the breakfast things, Isabel asked her to inform Monsieur that she was waiting for him. The girl looked at her in wide-eyed astonishment.

"But Monsieur is not here. Surely Madame knows that he went away at four o'clock this morning."

He had gone off with the actress.

VI

The eight years she spent in Bourges remained in Isabel's memory at first as a nightmare and then as a kind of somnambulism. In no real sense did she ever live there. She had chosen the place because she heard that the American tourist neglects it, and when she had seen the Cathedral and had discovered that the town was after all large enough to lose one's self in, she found an apartment in a quiet street, the rue de la Frange. There she buried herself. Several times each year she made a brief excursion to some neighboring country, once to Florence, once to Geneva, repeatedly to Munich and Weimar. But none of these places yielded the vitalizing energy she was in need of. The trouble with them all, she learned to tell herself, was that they were too European. They were steeped in too much history. They reported too completely the long cruelty of man to man, and especially of man to woman. Not that the human race was different elsewhere. If towns like Fairfax, if American towns in general, seemed a better place, she knew it was because the record was as yet brief, and the total cruelty was as yet small. Otherwise there was no real superiority.

Living under the shadow of the Cathedral, or at least in the thought of it, she watched her neighbors, the young wife of the middle-aged doctor on the floor above her, the bookseller across the street, whose daughter was squandering her eyesight in the dimly lighted shop over

his frightfully elaborate accounts, the woman who came for the laundry and who thrashed the linen in cold water with villainous soap. Such lives, against the background of such beauty! The gorgeous ritual of the mass gave her an abstract sort of satisfaction. What the priest was singing at any given moment, she had not the least idea, though with time her French became equal to most of the sermons, on those occasions when she cared to stop for the sermon. In the fastidious phrase of the foreign language she recognized old doctrines of the love of God and of man's love for his brethren. Applying the doctrine as a test of her own experiences and of experiences observed in her neighbors, she became a cynic.

At first she found it hard to continue writing, since all admiration for other human beings had gone out of her. What difference did it make now what she wrote, or whether any one read her work? She even asked herself if it would not be a kind of escape to find humble manual labor and support herself by dressmaking, like the poor old maid who mended her clothes. Or even by keeping books, like the stationer's daughter. Intellectual pride she had utterly cast off. There would be a satisfaction, perhaps, in serving some good bourgeois family as cook, if only she could learn how to prepare things in the French way. Would it not be a good irony to send in rich dishes for the spiritual influence they might have upon the human animals who employed her? If the husband were cheerful, it would be because she in the kitchen had satisfied his unphilosophical stomach; if the wife reported to her intimate friends that Henri had presented her with a handsome birthday gift, the real reason would be that she, Isabel Beauvel, too experienced American

novelist, had contrived over the fragile French stove an unusually rich sauce. No end to the possibilities. A successful dessert might make the brute love his wife with unexpected passion, and the poor woman would always flatter herself that she had appealed to his soul. Or it might make him love his neighbor's wife. You never could tell.

If Isabel denied herself these satiric satisfactions and continued her writing, it was partly because of a lingering resentment against Winthrop and Mary. To obscure herself completely in the life of seamstress or cook would be to leave them in complete peace. No doubt they'd be glad never to hear of her again. But so long as she invented stories, she could count on Mary to read them, and even if Winthrop did not, he would know they were in the magazine. He would see her name on title pages. Once every so often he would be disconcerted. She exerted her will-power to the utmost and wrote stories.

The difficulty about the cynical vein, she found, was that you have to increase the emphasis upon it as you go along. Readers, and especially editors, become accustomed even to vinegar and call for more strength in the seasoning. She learned this after she sent home the third story from Bourges. The editor wrote her that though he found nothing specifically wrong with the manuscript, it didn't "click" like the other two. He wondered if she would care to rewrite it, and add the quality which was now associated with her name. Before complying with his suggestion, she read the latest number of the magazine, to see what devices her fellow authors employed to produce the desired click. Really, the other stories in comparison with hers were tame, entirely

American. She concluded that what the editor wanted was greater bitterness in the tone. She retouched the story, made the villain more heartless, portrayed his sensuousness with a clearer line, substituted for a tragic sentence at the end a note of bravado, and received in due time the editor's check with his thanks. After that she wrote what she knew would be welcome. None of her experiences, not even the most intimate sensations, were withheld.

To say that she was unhappy would not be altogether accurate; dulled would be the better word. Nothing that she did now seemed quite real, and nothing very important. She had fallen into a machine-like state, in which her mind worked and her heart slept. Only once or twice in those years did she feel a strong emotion of any sort, and then she suspected she was sentimental, or perhaps maudlin. She liked to give Christmas presents to the children of the concierge, wretched little creatures who too seldom smiled, and once she gave them all a birthday party on her own birthday. She laughed and joked to cheer them up, but their manners remained so careful and so subdued that for several days afterward she felt melancholy.

To the drabness of these unhappy years, Stewart brought the first contrast. She met him one gray day, just inside the door of the Cathedral. He was talking to the sexton in rapid French, but she knew at once he was an American. Tall, a little thin, wearing silver-rimmed spectacles, rather intellectual, even ascetic, yet kindly—she thought he must be a professor of some sort, perhaps even a minister. In any case she knew he was not a cynic like herself. He came from a world

she had once known, but to which she no longer had access. He and she would always be strangers.

A few weeks later she met him again in the same place, but this time making drawings of some architectural details. He stood with his hat under his left elbow, and sketched rapidly on a small pad. When she stared at him, he looked up and caught her eye. He had a charming smile.

"I see you love this place as much as I do."

"Yes," she said. "It's a wonderful building."

"Wonderful? There are few in the world lovelier."

He went on with his sketching, completely at ease with himself and the universe. She knew that this man had no problems. He had spoken to her because it was natural to do so, and he had stopped speaking because that was natural too. He had no special interest in her, yet no discourteous lack of interest, either. If she should move on now, he would never think of her again.

She walked toward the choir and feasted her eyes for the hundredth time on the gorgeous windows of the chapels. Even while she gazed at them, she was sensitive of the fact that he was standing in the nave with his sketch book. She continued around the chancel and down the other aisle opposite him. If he should lift his eyes as she went by, she would take it as an omen that a new and sound friendship had come into her starved life. But he did not raise his eyes. She walked over to him.

"How does the drawing get on?"

"Oh, it's not really a drawing, only notes."

"You're a painter, I suppose."

"Dear me, no, nothing better than a historian. I'm doing a history of the Cathedral, and these details of style date many things in it."

"Of course," she said, not quite sure, however, which details he referred to, or what it was they dated. He went on sketching. She would have gone away, but it was awkward to make a break. He ought to say something first. She waited until he did.

"You are perhaps a painter yourself?"

"No, as it happens, I am a writer too."

Then, to give herself a rooted place in the world he evidently admired, she added:

"I've been coming here almost every day for eight years."

He looked around now with genuine interest.

"What aspect of it are you working on? Don't say you've forestalled me!"

"No, indeed. I'm only a novelist, and at the moment I'm writing nothing better than short stories."

He looked relieved.

"How interesting. And you've been here eight years!"

"Yes."

"I can easily understand it. There's enough in this town to fascinate one for a lifetime. One winter is all I have to spend, and heaven knows how I can get through in so short a time."

"I shan't interrupt you longer, then."

He laughed.

"Oh, please don't take that remark amiss."

She found she could smile back at him with unaccustomed cheerfulness.

"Good-by and good luck."

"We are sure to meet again here," he said. "For the rest of the year you won't be able to enter this building without stumbling over me in some part of it."

She stayed away from the Cathedral longer than she otherwise would, just because he was working there, and she feared he might resent or misinterpret her intrusion. But the thought that he was in the great church each day, working with his sketch book, was itself a kind of companionship, and her gloomy mood became rarer. When at last she did venture inside the portals and saw him, as she expected, busy with his note-book, but this time further along in one of the transepts, she was pleased that his greeting was easy, like that of an old acquaintance.

"Where have you been? The Cathedral feels neglected."

"Oh, I come here only at odd moments. I am neither devout nor scholarly. A very ordinary literary person."

He went on with his pencil.

"Your stories keep you busy, I suppose. What is it you are writing?"

"Nothing that you'd call important, I'm afraid. . . . Do you always work?"

His eyes questioned her.

"I mean—I was wondering if you ever interrupt yourself in the afternoon for a cup of tea. There would be one in my rooms waiting for you, if you cared for it. And I'd enjoy talking with some one from home."

"How delightful! Of course I'll come. Where shall I find you?"

She wanted to suggest that she'd take him back with

her to the little apartment that afternoon, but such haste would perhaps be unseemly.

"If I came here to-morrow about four, would you be ready? We could walk to my room together."

Across her little tea table she knew he was what she had guessed—a gentleman of the old-fashioned kind, quite as masterly in his orbit as Carl had been in his. Deeply she was grateful to him, after these years of solitude and wretched memories, to see that he recognized instinctively the sort of woman she was. Here at last, she told herself, was breeding and true culture, with him a woman could find companionship based on long practise in good manners. But as they talked it wasn't Carl with whom she contrasted him, it was Winthrop—poor old Winthrop, who would have liked this man as much as she did, but who would have had some difficulty in keeping up with the Middle Ages and ecclesiastical history. Stewart was the sort of person to whom fine and significant things naturally gravitated. For example, he had read her first novel, as she found with delight, and he had heard about the others. He called her Miss Beauvel, and it wasn't worth the pains to set him straight.

"But you told me the other day that you are now writing short stories. I don't know about those. Where do they come out?"

She mentioned the magazine, and he apologized for never looking at it.

"I suppose I'm rather narrow, but I've much to read in my own field, and the time is short. It mortifies me to know how large a part of our literature at home I am missing."

"So far as my work is concerned, you're wise to stick

to the Cathedrals. You probably wouldn't like what I write, anyway."

The remark stirred him.

"Surely you do yourself injustice, Miss Beauvel. Would you—would it be too much to ask you some time to read me one of the stories, or let me borrow a copy of the magazine, if you have it with you?"

She knew instinctively it would be better to put him off. She wouldn't be quite comfortable reading to him the sort of thing Carl had approved.

"I haven't a copy of the magazine." The little fib did not trouble her. "But some time, if you wish it, I'd love to read one of the stories to you."

"Why not now?"

"It really isn't important. I'd rather hear about your Cathedral."

At the time he urged her no further, and it was not till a month later that he made the acquaintance of her work. The meetings at tea had been revived weekly in her rooms or at a secluded café of which he was fond. They had accepted each other as a superior kind of traveling companion, with pleasant cordiality for the moment, but with no responsibility for the future. It piqued her a little to reflect that though he liked her he probably would have been just as happy if she had never crossed his path. The passion that most men distribute over many objects he had centered upon historical research. He was, as he confessed, Gothic-mad. It was annoying to realize that she and every other human being he encountered were to him merely faint clues to the psychology of men and women in the thirteenth century. For him, history was not an attempt to interpret his own

day by what had gone before; rather, he used everything that was or might be to interpret what had been. In one mood of slight resentment she thought of telling him that human nature belongs to no century exclusively, and that a truly catholic philosophy would study men and women in universal aspects, but the idea brought Carl back to mind, and she said nothing.

It was only when at last she had read to him one of her stories that she learned how much he cared for her. She herself proposed the reading.

"I've just finished a short thing," she said one afternoon, when it was her turn to play hostess. "Would you care to give me your criticism before I send it off?"

As she read, she was conscious in his attitude of more criticism than he was likely to express. When she looked up from the page she could see how large his eyes were, in an astonishment not altogether approving, but she read on, telling herself that if he didn't understand her point of view it would be because his experience was limited. When she turned down the last page, she realized that the reading had cost her an effort.

"There, now you know the worst. What do you think of it?"

He pondered a moment in a flattering silence, as though he would go to any trouble not to make a false comment.

"Of course it's beautifully written—I needn't tell you that, and it's rather impressive. I don't know when I've heard anything that sounded in its way more real."

"In its way?"

"Yes, in the field of experience you have chosen to write about. I'm not qualified to judge, Miss Beauvel.

Reality for me—would you mind if I say it?—lies elsewhere."

He spoke lightly, with not the least touch of priggishness, and she couldn't resent the comment, but of course she must defend herself.

"If you think this sort of incident is not true——"

"Oh, it happens, but in the long run it's negligible. For me the real things are those which last. Those men who built the Cathedrals, for example, were, on the side of earthly frailty, a pretty human lot. It's easy to guess at their lives so far as women are concerned, and some of the great ladies who now lie sculptured in the old tombs had extremely secular adventures. But in my history I shan't mention such things. So much of time, so much of the body, so much of love in so far as it belongs to the body, is illusion, that it's hardly worth while to preserve any of it in statistics."

Isabel flushed slightly.

"Then you would shut your eyes to it all?"

He lifted his fine hand in a gesture of apology.

"I don't set myself up as the last word in such matters, but I really do prefer to remember life only after it has taken on a permanent form. The old passions and emotions have disappeared with the dust that was in their once living bodies. The beautiful things they made are still here. That's what I like to study."

She tried to tell herself that he was lecturing to her, yet she knew he wasn't. To resent what he said would be to accuse herself.

"Of course that's the noble way of looking at it, but isn't there a relation sometimes between these passions

you speak of, between this temporary dust of the body, and the created beauty which endures? And if you told the whole story of human life, ought you not to set down the agonies, aspirations and sufferings from which beauty might arise?"

He nodded.

"If I were a novelist, I suppose I ought to tell the whole story—if I were a novelist, or if I were God. Being but a timid specialist, I confine myself to the part of it which needs least interpretation."

He smiled slightly and returned to his tea, as though he had extricated himself once for all from a hard question. She regretted that the talk had got back to his Cathedrals, or was going in that direction, and her story would now slip from his mind. But she misjudged him.

"Since you asked my opinion, Miss Beauvel, I shan't be quite so cowardly as to leave half of it unemphasized. Granted the philosophy upon which you write, I think your story is incomplete. You've indicated the suffering and the sordidness of life, but none of the beauty which may possibly be built out of it. In fact, the tone is too despondent to permit the faith that beauty ever will result. The Cathedrals, I think, contradict you."

"They belong to another age."

"Oh, I used them only as a metaphor. If we were not living in decadence, we might have their parallels to-day."

She got up and put the manuscript away. When she turned around his eyes were on her.

"Miss Beauvel, I shouldn't have presumed to speak so if I did not know the story does you injustice. You

are greater than what you write. When I said the story was incomplete, I was expressing my disappointment not to find all of you in it."

She felt quite sorry for herself.

"You are generous, but you don't know me."

"I doubt if there is any generosity, Miss Beauvel, and I believe I do know you. You will permit me to say that what I do know I greatly admire."

After that talk she found it impossible to write. Whenever she planned a new plot, he was there somehow by her side, warning her to be noble, yet failing to supply her with renewed faith. He was a great spirit, she told herself, but lofty rather than broad. To him heaven would come as no surprise, but he would die in ignorance of the world. She was trying to justify herself. After all, the employment in which he was wasting precious hours betrayed the flaw in his philosophy. The Cathedrals, however beautiful, were only the loveliest and most tragic of fossils. They were vestiges from which, even by his own definition, man had not evolved upward but had declined. The priests in the choirs still chanted the ritual, but in a language which no one now spoke elsewhere, to a God whom no one formulated now in precisely those terms, and to a congregation made up of a few old frightened women, a handful of frantic tourists, a bewildered novelist and a research historian. No, her literary material had run out. She could do nothing more from Carl's point of view, she could learn nothing from Stewart's, she was not sure what her own point of view was.

But the reading of the story had a different effect upon him. The meetings at tea became more frequent,

and from time to time he asked if he might spend the evening, to talk not about his own work, as it turned out, but about her. He had a quiet way of probing her thoughts, but of her previous life he never asked. Perhaps he had judged from the writing that her past was too full of temporary dust. On the other hand, she could not blind herself to the pleasant fact that he was discovering in her something beautiful and permanent. If she knew anything about men, if she were not deceiving herself about this unusual species, he was falling in love. At first she thought he was only disposed to reform her, but gradually she knew without doubt that she was becoming for him some sort of ideal, a dream which he was trying to blend with those other dreams of his. She was for him a fair spirit of the thirteenth century, gone astray but not irrevocably. Like other men he was lonely, but in his case loneliness was a lack of something to worship. The mystic beauty he had been content to seek for in colored glass, in flying buttress, in carved pillar, in candles and in altar stone, he was now yearning to imagine in her, that he might clasp it to his heart.

She made no mistake as to what was in his thought or in his subconscious longings, and though at first she knew well she did not love him, his ideal of her made her proud. He was the last man on earth she would care to disappoint. When she perceived beyond question that their happy talks had gone over into a kind of courtship, she prolonged them willingly and drew from them gentle satisfactions, without ever facing the decision which sooner or later must be made; so that when at last he asked her for her love, she knew she was bound to give it. By listening so long without protest to his praise of

her, she had committed herself. He took her in his arms and kissed her, not as Winthrop would have done, or Carl, but as though she were something divine.

"We must be married here," he said, "in the Cathedral where I found you, amid all this wonder which is your true home."

She would have given anything to say yes, with nothing to explain.

"We'll be married here, Stewart, as you say."

"And how soon, Isabel?"

"Just as soon as I—as I can get my divorce."

He could not understand her.

"Stewart, I've never told you, because there seemed no occasion to, but I was married, and nine years ago I left my husband. That's why I'm living here alone, to try to forget."

He turned quite pale.

"I have no right——"

She gave him time to go on.

"Isabel, I love you more than I could put into words, but neither of us would ever be happy if I took you from your husband."

"You are not taking me from him; he married another woman."

She had put her hands on his shoulders and was looking up at him.

"But I thought you just said you are still getting a divorce."

"Stewart dear, I hate to speak of such things plainly to such a man as you. Forgive me for having disguised the ugly fact. These nine years my husband has been living with a woman to whom he is not married at all. I

came away just as soon as I found out what he was doing. I am giving him the divorce now so that they need not continue to live in sin."

He thought for a moment.

"And how soon can we marry, Isabel?"

"Oh, very soon now. I'll write my lawyer and find out. Until I met you, dear, the dates had no interest for me."

When he left her that day, she knew they would be married, but she knew also that what she had revealed had made him sad. It hurt her to suspect that from that moment his love might have in it the alloy of honor, the resolve to keep his word with her. Had he known first that she was a married woman, would he ever have proposed? She was ashamed too that with him, as with Winthrop and with Carl, she to some extent had played a part just when she would have liked most to be sincere. Yet if she had confessed the truth that the divorce was not yet applied for and the lawyer not yet consulted, might he not have believed, in his inexorable idealism, that she should even now forgive Winthrop and go back to him? The thought of her husband made her angry. If Stewart's ideal of her failed and he gave her up, she must still have that divorce. Outrageous that Winthrop and Mary should cheat her of happiness for the rest of her days!

She eased her feelings by writing a savage letter telling him that she must have the divorce at once. This time she said nothing about a marriage of her own, but based the request upon her unwillingness to remain longer in a false position. She would consider him and Mary, she said, in any way that he could suggest. He

might select whichever lawyer he preferred and cable to her the name and address, and she would start proceedings. But if within a fortnight she did not receive his cable, she would engage a lawyer abroad.

As she posted the letter she wondered whether there would be difficulties in carrying out the threat, whether one could secure a divorce from the other side of the Atlantic, or whether long absence, such as hers, weakened the claim. But one had to begin somehow, and she would find out the procedure as she went along.

The dispatch of this ultimatum gave her the sense of greater security, and when Stewart came to her again, she saw that his love would not fail. Obviously he was saddened, but he worshiped her still.

"Stewart, what I told you the other day troubles you. We must not begin our happiness under a possible shadow, and if you won't think me bold to talk of such matters, I'd like to ask something about your feeling toward me. We shall always be entirely frank, shan't we?"

He squeezed her hand, to reassure her.

"If the fact that I have been married saddened you, was it because you don't wish a wife who has already belonged to another? Some men do feel that way, I know."

His protest was quick, and she knew it was sincere.

"Isabel, I swear such an idea never entered my head. I was thinking only of your vows, and of the vows we hope to make."

Ten years before, his words would have awakened in her an instant response. Now she had to put herself back into his point of view. She felt very old.

"You still wish to marry me, Stewart?"

"That wish is beyond my control. Of course I shall marry you, if you will have me."

"Then let me say one thing more, and we'll drop this unpleasant subject for ever. I feel as you do about the vows. I shall always think my life a little warped or frustrated by what has happened to me. You and I should have met in the first place, and we would always have been true. But the vows between my husband and me are on my conscience, not yours, and he broke them first. If you care to marry me now, for what remains of life, we can share a noble love. If for conscience' sake you deny yourself what you believe to be happiness, and deprive me of what I know is such, we shall both be paying to my husband a consideration which he could never understand, and which would in no respect improve his own relation to society."

"I wasn't considering your husband."

"You mean you were thinking of God, weren't you, Stewart? My faith is that He will understand our love more easily than He ever could Winthrop's and mine."

He mentioned the divorce no more, and they took up their life in this new and intimate comradeship. Part of each day they spent together, studying in the Cathedral or consulting over the manuscript of his book. Since he was not of a selfish or monopolizing temperament, hardly a week went by without his beseeching her to show him the story she was working on, and just because he had such respect for her own rights as an artist, she pretended to have something in hand, yet she put him off. When he asked her if she had heard from home, she knew he referred to the lawyer. She told him truthfully

that she had received no word. Wherever Winthrop was, whatever he was doing, he had apparently determined to defy her. Once in a panicky moment she remembered she had no certain knowledge that he was still alive. All these years she had heard little about him, and recently nothing at all.

Of course she ought now to look up that lawyer. Undoubtedly one could be found in Paris, but she dreaded to consult a provincial advocate in Bourges. No one there would understand her problem, and Stewart might hear of what she was doing. When she told him once that sooner or later she must go to Paris and consult her banker, he said he would make the trip with her in search of books. She pursued the suggestion no further.

From week to week her plight became more acute, and strange to say the very fineness of Stewart's conduct was not the least of her distresses. That he loved her she could not doubt, but his sense of honor was terrifying. His kisses were full of worship and, she was forced to notice, of nothing else. He would appropriate only the merest bloom of his happiness until she was finally and publicly released from those vows which to him were more essential than happiness itself. She could not put from her mind the thought that Carl in the same situation would have behaved very differently. Really, any lover would, she told herself. When by chance she found on a bookstall a French novel in which the hero and heroine fall in love at sight, live together from that moment, and marry when they can, she bought it and left it on the table in her room, as she had once spread out *The Atlantic Monthly* to catch Winthrop's eye. Stewart paid no attention whatever to the paper-

covered volume, and on second thought she was glad he did not read it. He might have believed she was trying to convey a hint. Of course in a way she was, but if he should think so——

What she ought to do, she learned at last in one exalted evening spent over his manuscripts. The passage dealt with the architecture of the Lady chapel, and he had written wonderful things about the worship of the Virgin—wise, poetic understandings of the human needs which had expressed themselves in that too often misunderstood cult. As he read the pages to her, she realized for the first time how lofty his nature was, how faithfully he could follow a dream, how indifferent he would always remain to the things which his rare nature would judge earthly. Such a man, she felt, would never again cross her path. But when she went home that night, she told the astonished concierge she was leaving for Paris early the next morning, and silenced his voluble protests with the gift of a thousand francs. Her books and her furniture she would send for later—he might hold them till she had settled for the remainder of her lease. Until dawn she was packing her trunk and her bags. When Stewart came to look for her the next afternoon the concierge gave him the note she had left behind.

You are the noblest man I shall ever meet, he read, *but you are right about the vows. We should always be unhappy. Forget me, or if you should remember, don't be sad.*

Part Four

COROLLARIES

COROLLARIES

I

THE morning after that fatal conversation on the staircase, Winthrop stopped at Mary's room. By daylight it seemed emptier than ever, with the furniture removed. She opened the door to his knock.

"Isabel has gone," he said simply.

Mary motioned him to the couch under the empty bookshelves, and sat down in the chair at the other side of the table.

"I'm not surprised," she said. "She wouldn't let such a good excuse slip from her hands. I'm awfully sorry for you, Winthrop. Please don't hate me."

For the moment he hardly heard this last plea. His mind was still on Isabel.

"She said rather stinging things about giving us a divorce, and I suppose she will always believe we were deceiving her with some deliberate plot. No, I shan't hate you, Mary—never. I admired you for telling her the truth and for adding that neither of us is in love with the other. If it's anybody's fault, it's mine, but I tell you now I haven't the sense of sin Isabel thinks I ought to have. Not so far as she is concerned. The person I worry about is you. I owe you a great deal, —a big debt for your friendship and a bigger one still for clearing up all misunderstanding between Isabel and me, even at this cost."

When she smiled, he realized how haggard her face was, that morning; the look of weariness made him suddenly contrite.

"I was a brute!" he cried. "Altogether a selfish brute!"

She smiled again and shook her head.

"If you're a brute, Winthrop, what am I? Why not describe ourselves a little more kindly and a little more accurately? I went into this masquerade out of a desire to help Isabel. That's the way I stated the motive to myself. Now I believe there was some curiosity in it, some hunger for adventure. As our friendship grew I told myself I wanted to help you too, but perhaps I have been wanting something else, Winthrop. It was the first time a man had turned to me with his confidence and with his admiration. The reason I didn't bring myself to tell you the truth, was that I couldn't give up your high opinion of my talents. When you took me in your arms last night, I might have fought you off, if I'd really wanted to. At the moment I thought I was helpless, but now I'll be honest and admit I'm not so sure. There, I doubt if a woman has ever revealed herself more completely. I won't deceive myself in the slightest degree, and I won't have your pity. You intended no wrong, and you did none. We can say good-by now, and always remember each other as friends."

He stared stupidly at the floor.

"That's a generous way to put it," he said, "but it lets me off too easily."

She interrupted.

"Let me add one other thing, Winthrop—the break between you and Isabel, even if it turns out to be permanent,

does not trouble me in the least. I used to think she was a great woman, but the nonsense that arose from that essay of hers showed me my mistake. She doesn't know her own mind, yet she's completely selfish. She hadn't the courage to tell you that she wanted a little freedom. She probably is feeling more light-hearted this morning than for a long time."

They both sat a moment in silence.

"Where is she going, Winthrop?"

"To Europe—France, I believe. She left for New York."

"Well, I'll meet her over there, somewhere."

"That's what I came to see you about. You can't very well go now, Mary."

"Why not?"

He hesitated, much embarrassed.

"There are a good many reasons. The least important is that if you stayed, you might help me get around the scandal that is sure to start. I've got to tell some tall lies about Isabel's absence—that is, if she doesn't start the gossip herself."

"I don't see how my staying would help. It might only make the gossip worse."

"Well, there's another thing more important—I shouldn't like you to be off in some strange country if you're to have a child."

She looked at him as though it were the easiest subject in the world to discuss.

"I doubt if the child is likely, Winthrop, but I shan't be maudlin and pretend I wish it were, for your sake, or anything of the sort. Wouldn't it be a beastly nuisance!"

He wasn't sure whether the lightness of manner was

an affectation. Perhaps he was ever so faintly taken back that she rejected the maudlin point of view.

"Well, anyway, why can't you stay here a few weeks and let me come and talk over my affairs with you? That's selfish, I suppose, and perhaps rather preposterous, but you're the one person in the secret, and if I know this place, I'll need help."

She had no doubt that his appeal was as simple as it seemed.

"Winthrop, I'm awfully sorry for the trouble you're in. What do you think of doing?"

"Leave Fairfax, of course. I'll make the excuse of taking my business somewhere else, and I'll tell the neighbors that Isabel went abroad for the good of her art. If any one pries further, I'll admit that we two were somewhat incompatible, and that I am moving out of town to free myself of melancholy memories. How's that?"

"But if you're going, Winthrop, why should I stay?"

"Oh, I was just asking you to give up the European trip, not to remain necessarily in Fairfax. I'll get your ticket canceled for you, and if you like, you might go to Harrington. That's the place I'm thinking of. Do you know it?"

She shook her head.

"Winthrop, I'd gladly be of any help to you, but I can't see where your plan will lead us. I'd better go my way from now on, and you go yours. If you care to write, we can always discuss your plans by letter."

He looked deeply disappointed.

"You'd really prefer that?"

"Yes."

He rose to go.

"All right. There's really no reason at all why you should do what I asked, and if you did, I know there'd be nothing in it for you. Good-by, Mary."

His forlorn mood touched her.

"Winthrop, I'll tell you this frankly—this fashion of being frank, which Isabel started, is a pest!—one reason I hesitate to stay in your neighborhood is that you might misinterpret and think I loved you. I don't, you know, and after this bad beginning I never shall. I have nothing but a good, honest fellow-feeling for you."

He grasped at the encouragement, even so slight.

"I wasn't asking for love—I'll never bother you on that side. What I want is only friendship."

Frank as they both thought they were, neither told the other how reluctant they were that morning to be alone, or how they dreaded to face the days that must follow. . . . When he went to Harrington to find an apartment, she met him at the station, and they made the search together. She told herself she was devoting the day exclusively to his errand, helping as Isabel should have done.

The real estate man to whom Winthrop resorted, after vain inquiries on his own accord, thought they were man and wife. Repeatedly he had addressed Mary as Mrs. Beauvel, and since it was none of his business what their true relation was, they did not enlighten him. Apartments could be found, but none of any great comfort, none with enough light and air. The agent had on his list, however, a small house on the outskirts of the town, made attractive by a diminutive garden. To Winthrop's mood it appealed as a quiet retreat.

"The trolley will get you to the business center in ten

minutes," said the agent, "and if Mrs. Beauvel is fond of flowers——"

"I'd find the house rather hard to run," Winthrop began. He was going to add "alone," but checked himself for fear the agent should wonder why his wife would not be with him. He was thinking of Isabel.

"Not hard at all," said the man. "It's easy to get domestic help out here. They prefer it."

Before they had left Harrington that day, he had rented the house, and Mary had engaged for him a cook, a robust German woman, Martha.

"And I'll stay till the furniture arrives, Winthrop, to settle it for you, if you like."

They were saying good-by at the railway station, she to return to the hotel in Harrington, he to go back to Fairfax.

"You're awfully good."

He held her hand in a dumb kind of gratitude. Perhaps she thought the clasp a little too friendly.

"And when the house is settled, Winthrop, then you'll recall your end of the bargain, and not ask me to stay longer."

"I understand. After that I shan't trouble you another hour."

He really intended to keep his word, and she intended to go, but when the furniture was moved in, Martha started putting the house to rights. She addressed Mary as the agent had done, perhaps with a slightly tentative air, as though Mary might correct her if there was a mistake.

"Where does this chair go—Mrs. Beauvel?"

After all, it was Winthrop's place, not hers, to dis-

close his family history to these new neighbors of his. It made no difference, anyway. At the end of the day she would be gone, and there would be time enough for Harrington to learn that he was a deserted husband. Then the cook might always think, if she wished, that Mary was Isabel, the deserter. Explanations were useless things, anyway; life couldn't be explained.

"That chair goes in the drawing room," she said.

She had sealed her fate.

When Winthrop arrived a few minutes later, and helped with the unpacking, Martha was addressing Mrs. Beauvel as though they had been partners in toil all their lives. And by the end of the day, when they were quite worn out, it would have taken more ingenuity than either Winthrop or Mary had, to explain to the cook why the lady of the house should not spend the night there.

"I suppose you and Mr. Beauvel," she said, "will use the room with the double bed. I'll get it ready for you."

He rushed to the rescue.

"Make up the bed in the other room, too, Martha—the one next the guest room."

Mary did not meet his eye as he glanced across at her, but when they were alone she said:

"Of course it makes no difference for one night, Winthrop, and I *am* dreadfully tired."

"I know, Mary. I was afraid Martha had disconcerted you, but there's no reason why you shouldn't stay, we know that, and I confess that with a friend in it the house won't seem so strange.

She stayed that night, and the next, and then he sent to bring her baggage from the hotel, and she was installed in the room across the house from him, next

the guest room. Each day had furnished a handful of little accidents which made it harder for her to go, or rather, easier to stay than to leave. Yet he and she still held to the notion that her visit was but temporary, and that whenever she wished she might pursue her career elsewhere. No word of sentiment passed between them, only friendly conversations about the house, and consultations over the transfer of his business.

How gradually they drifted into another way of life, they both could measure by two stages. One occurred after they had been living in Harrington six weeks. Walking home from his new office, out of which colonial furniture was soon to spread a cultural influence upon Harrington, he met a man he had known slightly in Fairfax. The man greeted him with obvious awkwardness.

"Sorry you left us, Beauvel—don't need to tell you that. And, say old man, I'm downright sorry to know about the unhappiness at home."

Winthrop accepted the proffered handshake, but said nothing.

"Just heard the other day about the divorce," he went on. "You and she certainly managed to keep that mighty quiet, and I hear there's a new wife now. I wish you all sorts of luck."

He would have liked to kick the fellow into the gutter, but it was more practical to thank him and hurry on. When he entered his house, he went at once to Mary's room and told her the story.

"On the whole it's rather fortunate, if that rumor has got around. People will not be inclined to gossip further."

"But we're really not married, Winthrop, no matter what they think, and you and I can't be happy living in a false relation."

"Not permanently, of course, but for the time being. There's some convenience for us, out of this mistake."

She faced him with that same clear look with which she had told Isabel the truth.

"Let's know absolutely what it is we're doing. What's in your mind?"

He thought a moment before he replied.

"So far as I'm concerned, I hope we're working our way out of a bad situation. I really mean working out of it. You wish to be free of me as soon as possible—I understand that. In so far as I'm selfish, I'm glad you've stayed in this house a while so that I could change my life without too great inconvenience. So far as I'm unselfish, I hope this temporary arrangement will save you from unkind talk. Maybe I'm altogether wrong, perhaps in the end I shall only have made things worse for you, but at least I'm clear as to my intentions."

"That wasn't what I was asking about, Winthrop. We understand each other's motives pretty well, but from now on what is your definite plan? Will you continue to let people here believe that Isabel has divorced you and that I am your wife?"

"Why can't you let the matter rest in that state so long as it does not embarrass you? You can live on here and write your stories, until it seems to you better to go somewhere else. It's understood I haven't the slightest claim on you. I'm merely in your debt. If at any moment you decide to leave me, we'll say you've gone off on a journey, and if you then never come back, it

will be understood that I have made another failure of marriage."

She was more troubled than he had ever seen her.

"When Isabel read me her essay and I went to Boston to meet you, I felt I was slipping into some kind of trap. And the night I told her what we had done, I believed I should never be so caught again. Intelligent people ought to know where they are going. But I'm very much afraid we're drifting now toward what we don't foresee."

"What, for example?"

"Well, matrimony perhaps."

She laughed as she spoke, then continued in a graver tone.

"It's ridiculous that our training in modesty prevents us from saying what ought to be said. You and I know what can happen to a good man and a good woman unless they are on their guard, just because human beings are partly animals. The danger is always present, Winthrop. Do you think we can be friends here in the same house indefinitely without giving ourselves cause again for regret?"

"Well, if that time comes we shall know it's the moment for parting. . . . Mary, I don't think many men are more eager than I am to lead a decent life. I shan't be beaten by my mistakes of judgment and of impulse. Our one good reason for living on side by side in this curious way, is that we might help each other to avoid those errors a second time, to become normal again and stay so. . . . If you think I am wrong, then now is the time for us to part."

"Perhaps it is," she said.

He was disappointed, but he took her decision in good spirit.

"Whenever you like, then, and thank you for staying so long."

He went to his own room and dressed for dinner. During the meal he made an obvious effort to be cheerful, and she met him with bright answers. He knew she liked him for being a good sport about it. . . . And the comfortable home, the warm hearth, the pleasant candles on the table, the sense of privacy and of security, made her thoughts go back to a narrow room in a boarding house. The subject, they both knew, was not to be reopened, and she felt it would be indelicate that evening to discuss further the precise time of her departure. They said good night to each other in a mood of tenderness and repressed emotions.

The very next day Mary fell sick. At breakfast time she sent word by Martha that she had a temperature, and Winthrop felt at once a tragic responsibility, responsibility of a double sort, that she should be ill while under his protection in this dubious capacity. Though she declared it not yet necessary, he had a doctor in at once, a dapper young man who had only recently begun his practise, and who was protecting himself from his own youth, in the traditional way, by a Van Dyke beard. He examined her with formidable care.

"There's nothing seriously wrong with your wife, Mr. Beauvel," he pronounced at last. "She is perhaps a bit over-tired, and she gives me the impression of having been worrying about something."

He looked up at Winthrop as though to ask what she was worrying about.

"Well, she did wear herself out on the moving, but so far as I know there's nothing else to trouble her."

"Perhaps it was the moving, then."

To clear away the idea that her mind was troubled, Winthrop made his own diagnosis.

"She may have eaten something that disagreed, don't you think?"

"No, I don't think—it's a germ of some kind that's taken a hold on her because she was a little run down. No danger—just steady care, and we'll build her up."

"Shall we have a nurse?"

The doctor thought a moment.

"I really don't consider it necessary, if your servant is here all the time, and if you can keep an eye on her yourself. She needs rest more than anything else."

But in the weakness which lasted for days, she needed kind ministrations and cheerful words, and Winthrop found himself, almost every moment of his hours at home, sitting by her bedside, waiting on her, telling her the news of the day, reading to her. At first it amused them both that her illness was the occasion of overtures from their new neighbors. Men he had met as yet casually in the business district asked him how his wife was getting on—young Doctor Willoughby had told them she was sick. The wives of two of them stopped at the house to inquire, and left gifts of flowers.

"It takes you to break into society," said Winthrop. "Only last week we foresaw a solitary and sheltered life here."

Mary smiled faintly.

"I had no idea people were so kind, and we really are strangers to them."

During her convalescence, in fact, the first evening she was able to come to dinner, Martha announced callers. Doctor and Mrs. Warren. Winthrop and she looked at each other.

"He must be somebody you've met down-town."

"No, I've never heard the name. Did they say what their errand was, Martha?"

"It's Mrs. Beauvel they asked for, sir."

"You come with me, Winthrop. I can't meet anybody alone."

In the living room a grave-looking man of fifty-five or so, middle-sized but slight, waited for them. His face was extraordinarily kind, but he spoke with a touch of studied formality. Beside him stood a short, round-faced woman, keen-eyed and motherly.

"I am the pastor of the Presbyterian Church," he said. "Mrs. Warren and I heard by accident that Mrs. Beauvel was ill, and knowing you had but recently arrived here, we couldn't let you think of us as unsympathetic neighbors. It's very gratifying to see that Mrs. Beauvel is well again."

Mrs. Warren's round face broke into a contagious smile.

"I told George his own parishioners must be tired of him by this time, and he ought to exercise his pastoral care on fresh material. He's only a man, my dear, and he never knows just how sick any of us are. I'll take him home before he tires you out with his talk. We just ran in to see how you were, and to wish you good health again."

Doctor Warren was evidently accustomed to his wife's wholesale rebukes, delivered in the manner of utmost

affection. Winthrop and Mary liked them both, and the talk prolonged itself naturally for twenty minutes, with Mrs. Warren taking the lead. At last she pulled her husband's sleeve.

"It's time we went home, George. Mrs. Beauvel, I can't tell you how good it is to see people like you and your husband join our neighborhood. Wait till you get quite strong again, and then when you feel like it, come and see me. We're going to be friends."

Winthrop was wringing Doctor Warren's hand with a conviction of deep gratitude, though he didn't know for what. Perhaps because the minister and his wife had given him the sense of being taken back once more into normal and healthy society. For the moment, at least, these people knew nothing of the strange problem in his life and Mary's, and he thanked heaven for their ignorance. Doctor Warren evidently liked him too.

"There's one thing I wish to say, Beauvel, our call this evening has nothing whatever to do with whether or not you are a Presbyterian."

Winthrop laughed.

"I happen not to be."

"Well, I've known a number of good men who have shared your misfortune. Don't think I am trying to poach on some other minister's domains. We want your friendship just as neighbors."

When they had gone, Winthrop closed the door behind them and turned to Mary.

"They're the real thing, aren't they? That woman has lost her heart to you."

Mary looked happy for the first time in long weeks.

"It's you they like, Winthrop. I am so glad."

When they said good night, she reached up and kissed him. The next Sunday they went to the Presbyterian Church, merely, as Winthrop said, to show their good feeling.

The other episode, the one which marked the end of this transition in their lives, was Isabel's letter asking for the divorce. For months he and Mary had lived on with less and less worry over themselves, and with a growing content in their fate. Through the Warrens they met most of the doctor's congregation, and through Winthrop's business they made other friends. Just because they knew in their conscience how dubious their relation to life was, they continued to feel grateful to those who accepted them for what they were supposed to be. When he had been Isabel's husband, if Winthrop had been asked to join the men's club of the church, he might have declined without a second thought. When Mary had been living in her lonely room in Fairfax, she had prided herself on her detachment from all welfare movements. More than once she had written stinging criticisms of organized good works. But now she and Winthrop accepted every invitation, and they received many, to do their part in the common life. Conscious of what they were trying to live down in themselves, they leaned over backward toward respectability.

It did not yet occur to them that the life they were entering upon was not the one they would have chosen. For the moment its pleasantness obscured the fact that it was somewhat narrow, and that it was playing havoc with the leisure they both prized. Mary, indeed, found it quite impossible now to write. She told herself that in a little while her routine would be adjusted and she

would find time again, but engagements increased and the typewriter rested unused. Winthrop noticed the fact, and commented on it one evening from a practical angle.

"You mustn't be embarrassed," he said, "if I speak of it, but since you've been keeping house for me you haven't been able to follow your profession. You must be short of cash."

She flushed, and interrupted quickly.

"Why, I still have some money."

"Well, invest it, then. You must let me provide what we'll call your housekeeping salary."

"I can't take money from you, Winthrop. That would be indecent."

"Look here, Mary, it's a matter strictly between you and me. We know that our relation is innocent, and if you feel as I do, you'll agree that it is fairly happy, but I can't feel right about it any longer if I must be under a constant financial obligation to you. If you weren't here, the housekeeping would cost me a lot. You'll have to take from me what's fair."

Because he insisted, she compromised, accepting less than he wished to give.

"Very well, then, I'll invest the remainder for you. It may come in handy some day."

"You're too generous, Winthrop. Invest the money for yourself."

"I've more than I need. It's rather amusing, but most of the people we've met over at Doctor Warren's have bought some of the furniture. I had no idea Presbyterians were so prosperous. Some time I'll tell the doctor we did a good thing for ourselves, when we started listening to his sermons."

She noticed that he said "we," but it did not displease her. Since her illness, since the hours when his presence in her sick room had been a comfort, their partnership had seemed natural. It was still in no way a question of love, but rather of circumstances, such as would surround them had they been wrecked on a desert island. Neither had chosen the other through any spiritual idealizing. Loneliness and fellow sympathy had shaped their fate in Harrington, as it had brought on the catastrophe in Fairfax.

It was the next morning, with this conversation still fresh in his thought, that Winthrop received Isabel's letter, with the request for a divorce, so that she could marry Carl. Nothing had ever seemed to him so outrageously unjust. There she was, roaming irresponsibly about the world, self-righteous and selfish, coolly proposing that he should throw away for Mary and himself this new esteem which life had so mercifully attached to them. The letter made him realize by contrast the essential friendliness of Mary's nature, the human good sense, the inner poise. She, not Isabel, was the woman who should have been indignant with him, yet from the first she had been honest and more than just, and in the companionship in which they both were becoming deeply rooted she never once had permitted herself by syllable or by implication to reproach him. Isabel was really going too far. He seized a pen and started to write.

Toward the middle of the letter he set down the phrase, "Your going away forced us, through a chain of circumstances which neither you nor we foresaw, to live together." He stopped and considered the words, then tore the paper into small bits and began again. Next

time he wrote, "forced us to share the same home." It was the truth, and she might misunderstand the other phrase. But some of his indignation with Isabel at the moment rose from a loneliness which her letter made poignant. Isabel had found a man she wished to marry. He could never marry. Had he been in the mood of justice, he might have recalled that Isabel had offered him a divorce so that he could have Mary—or if he did now what Isabel asked, he too would be free. But being nearer to his own problem, he saw only the fact that love had been ruled out from Mary's relation with him, and they had vowed themselves to this Platonic companionship. He felt sadly cheated.

On the way home he debated whether to tell her of Isabel's letter, and decided not to. The naked exposure of every bit of information, the fashion inaugurated by Isabel's disastrous essay, brought good to no one. He would leave undisturbed such happiness as they now enjoyed.

He found Mary deep in a magazine, which she closed, he thought, rather hurriedly as he came in.

"What it is?"

She laughed.

"Nothing you'd like to read, I'm afraid. A new story by Isabel."

He kept his manner cheerful.

"That's good. What is it like?"

"To tell the truth, it's like nothing she ever did before. It's quite—well, quite modern—a love story from the Continental point of view. She must have been picking up something about life."

"Well, she needs to."

"It's awfully well-written, Winthrop. Really, an unusual story. I don't suppose you'd like to read it?"

"No!"

She laughed at the explosiveness of his reply, then put the magazine away and talked of other things. If he had still intended to tell her about Isabel's letter, the new story would have made him change his plan.

Perhaps they both felt a slight strain in the conversation, as they sought pleasant things to chat about. He was thinking hard of deeper subjects, and when they were alone in the living room toward the end of the evening, he reached over and took her hand as though to help himself say what he had to.

"Mary, the way we're living together is getting to be something of a strain, as you foresaw. That's true, isn't it?"

Entirely without false shame, she understood, and let him know she did.

"Of course it is, Winthrop. You're telling me it's time I should go. That's quite all right—I shan't delay."

He continued to hold her hand.

"There's another way out which perhaps you wouldn't care to consider. You might stay."

Again she understood perfectly.

"Winthrop, we promised ourselves never to do that. We were to lead entirely respectable lives, in spite of that one episode. What would happen to our character if we began to give ourselves leeway?"

"We were wrong," he said quite positively. "What we're talking about now is just as respectable as marriage. It's the same thing, if one is intelligent enough to regard the essentials. These months you've been as true

to me as any wife, and I think I've been a fairly decent husband."

She squeezed his hand.

"You've been a darling."

"Well, couldn't we go on the same way, with the same understanding that if ever you wished to, you could leave? . . . We gain nothing by denying ourselves. We should lose nothing by accepting what nature intended men and women to have. Everybody in this town thinks we are husband and wife. Martha, of course, takes it for granted that we are living together. Just what our relation really is within the walls of this house, nobody on earth but ourselves will know. Wouldn't it be the best way, Mary?"

"Winthrop, in my heart of hearts I believe I ought to leave, this minute."

But she did not withdraw her hand, and he knew that his thoughts were hers.

II

The next years of their evolution together unfolded so gradually that from month to month they were only at exceptional moments conscious of change. Had they not in the end suffered experiences which caused them to be more introspective than the average man and woman, they might have looked back afterward upon the period of Isabel's absence as upon an interval of peace, even of stagnation. Winthrop prospered in his business, they added to their household Maggie, an Irish waitress, the scandal that might have pursued them from Fairfax never showed itself. Outwardly they were well off. Inwardly they took on the habit of each other as though they were, under all forms of the law, man and wife.

But inwardly also they remained alert to danger, they never quite forgot their true state, nor the possibility of exposure. In those nine years and more they were reminded from time to time that to be logical in this world is difficult, and that to be at once logical and just is impossible. What troubled them most relentlessly was the growing conservatism of their daily round. The rich approbation of their friends and neighbors put to sleep at first any uneasiness which they would have felt at the network of duties and obligations in which they were inexorably enclosed, obligations which once they would have felt not binding, and duties which in some one else even now they would have considered trivial. But pricks to their latent sensitiveness were dealt them from sources outside of themselves.

In the early years of their life in Harrington it was Mary who most often encountered these admonitions. She was not unhappy with Winthrop, she liked him, and in her nature there was a strong domestic gift. She enjoyed caring for the house, providing for his comfort, protecting him from unwanted interruptions. His parting kiss in the morning and his greeting at night were rituals which, though they never had given her a deep thrill, she would have missed. But she was no longer able to write, she had nothing to say, and this barrenness of imagination troubled her more than she cared to admit. She tried to put it out of her thoughts. She told herself that after all she had never been intended for the literary career. Her early attempts were perhaps the result of girlish admiration for her favorite authors, rather than the result of any inner urge. Every young person has at some moment a flash of talent, but usually it dies out. That had been her case. At least, she was glad she had the sense not to keep on after the feeble spark had died.

Yet she missed none of Isabel's stories as they came out one by one in the popular magazine. She read them of course with mixed feelings, but with minute care and deep reflection. Since there was nothing ungenerous in her nature, she would have been ready in any case to admit their qualities, the vigor and point of the plot, the keenness of the dialogue, the shrewd guess at motives. Some one else might have complained that Isabel had turned hard, but to Mary this change seemed natural enough, easily accounted for by the trouble with Winthrop. She was far from hostile. She read the stories from the point of view of her own life now in Harring-

ton, she read them for things she had always wanted, the varied experience, the implied adventure. While she read, she became aware of a little envy. Isabel was not altogether unfortunate. Mary asked herself by way of comparison how in such a town as she was living in could any one widen his or her experience. Of course she was from certain points of view fortunate, but wasn't that what Isabel had written against in the first place? She knew now that Isabel's essay had divined more of truth than even the author realized. Happiness in a quiet place was narrowing. In suffering one could at least grow. The only suffering Mary could recall from the three years she had spent with Winthrop, was the agony of mind in those first days. But when such thoughts as these beset her, she put them aside, out of loyalty to him. No use to blame life for one's lack of talent. If she had really been a writer, she reminded herself, she would have written in any circumstances.

Her reputation as a literary woman, however, had come to Harrington in sufficient vigor to make her seem desirable as a member of the library committee. She was elected in the middle of her third year at Harrington. Mrs. Warren proposed her name, and Mary accepted the duty with some expectation of pleasant hours in an atmosphere of books. There were twelve on the committee, half of them men, but it was the women, she found, who had most initiative. Mrs. Warren herself had organized the library through the benefactions of private citizens, and though the city now paid most of the up-keep, a supplementary fund had to be raised annually for the purchase of new publications. When Mary accepted the election, Winthrop teased her a little

by suggesting that the size of his pocketbook as much as the weight of her genius had made the family seem eligible for the post. His attitude, she soon discovered, was not altogether unjust to the men on the committee; they rarely spoke unless the question was of finance. Literary problems were handled by the women.

For the first few meetings no subject arose which called for competence either financial or literary. Mary came home at the end of one afternoon a little disappointed.

"There's something wrong with us, Winthrop, but I don't know what it is. Really there was no excuse for a meeting to-day. Nothing whatever to vote on which might not have waited for twenty years, yet we heard resolutions, seconded them, and passed them as merrily as though the world depended on us. When I saw how seriously the others take their duties, I felt like an outsider, an intruder upon the mysteries of a cult."

"Oh, well, much of business is always like that. You have to keep the machine running smoothly for the moment when there really will be work to do. After all, it's worth while for you people to meet once a month just to learn that everything is in order."

She waited till Maggie had left the room.

"Winthrop, we've been living together nearly three years."

"Quite true."

"I thought of it at the meeting."

He failed to grasp the sequence.

"Are our lives going to be like that, just running smoothly and accomplishing nothing in particular?"

She knew at once that the thought had already oc-

curred to him. He looked almost relieved that she had expressed it.

"If you think we're standing still, Mary, then we ought to rescue ourselves. Of course we must accomplish something."

"I wish I could begin with the library committee," she said. "It troubled me this afternoon that I had no suggestions to make. When we got as far as new business, I should have liked to propose any number of splendid innovations. Surely we're not perfect."

Winthrop thought a moment.

"We've been sticking to this town for quite a while. Would it help you to travel? I could arrange to leave the business."

He avoided the suggestion that she go alone. It was always understood now that they were to see the experiment through together.

"The travel would be pleasant, Winthrop, but that's no solution to what I am thinking of. A genuine person ought to get inspiration from whatever is his natural environment."

"Bosh! A change would do any one good, even the most genuine."

"Something I heard at the meeting touched my conscience. Mr. Barton, the school principal, told us of the success of that young girl he engaged for the English class. I suppose she had the same training for her work as any other teacher, and she's frightfully young to be teaching at all. He said he hesitated a long while before he took on a person with no experience, and he did so only because her mind had the quality of creativeness and eagerness. Well, she's simply setting the children on fire

for books. Her classes besiege the library; that's how we came to speak of her. The librarian wanted to know who had inoculated those young barbarians with the intellectual life. That girl makes me ashamed of myself."

He answered as though he had not caught her sense of tragedy.

"You're always too modest, Mary. You have no real cause to envy anybody."

"But why can't *we* do something for the town, something for older people of our own age? We know much more about life, you and I, than many of our friends. Is there no way to use the knowledge? I think the library ought to get the older people excited, not only the children."

She thought she saw in his face a look of pain, and it occurred to her that possibly she would seem to be criticizing him. Since they had joined their destinies, he had read little, perhaps had been glad not to think. She wouldn't like him to suspect her of administering a reproof by indirection.

"It seems to me," he said, "before you can get older people excited, as you call it, you'd have to know some of the reasons why they are calm. I doubt if it can be explained always by calling them stupid. Perhaps they were quite alive when they were younger, and something in life has taught them to appreciate a little peace."

It would have been a good point at which to drop the discussion, but conscience drove her on.

"I won't judge other people, Winthrop, but for me that kind of peace would be cowardice, so long as there was trouble in the world unsolved. The other teachers,

I suppose, who do an honest job without ever exciting the children, are in a way satisfactory, unless through fear of rousing some child's mind they are letting abilities die which one day would have been of value to the world. I suppose the grown people here and everywhere else get along without much thought, but in order to enjoy the slumber of their minds they must also forget the wretches in jail, the handicapped in poverty, the crippled everywhere. Look here, Winthrop, our case is as good an illustration as any. We're fairly happy, aren't we? But it's not because our lives have turned out as we would have planned them, or as we'd like to plan for others; it's because we agreed to take what we could get and not think too much."

Her earnestness troubled him.

"I've started to wrestle with this myself, but I've always put the ideas promptly out of my mind. Evidently you don't think that's the right way—you believe we ought to keep on worrying. . . . Or would you be more at ease if you left me?"

The suffering on his face was so clear now that she was sorry she had introduced the disagreeable theme. She hadn't intended to start an argument. After all, to what would it lead?

"No, I don't wish to leave you, and I don't believe we ought to worry. Worry isn't an activity of the mind, anyway—it's just nerves, or something. But out of our experience you and I surely have learned some wisdom which would be of use somewhere in other lives. It makes me a little sad that we keep it all to ourselves."

She was surprised at the extent to which her feelings had carried her, surprised and disconcerted. He would

not forget what she had said. From now on they would watch each other for signs of discontent.

Before the next meeting of the library committee, however, they had both sunk back into a normal, uninspired acquiescence. She was forced to recall their conversation only when she sat once more in the trustees' room, in the left wing of the brick and limestone building, looked out at the bit of lawn between the front door and the street, and listened to futile business, transacted with ceremony. Mr. Barton called for the minutes, and little Mrs. Martin, adjusting her glasses, began to read. If she wasn't a fool, thought Mary, she'd know her minutes recorded nothing at all. When the treasurer reported a deficit, however, the meeting became more alert. One of the men, speaking for the finance division of the board, suggested that even with the fund which they raised annually, they ought to inaugurate some economies.

"Perhaps it's not for this committee to propose, but some of us think we have been wasteful in the magazine room. Two years ago we committed ourselves to the policy of subscribing to all important magazines, on the ground that there should be one place in the community where that kind of literature is completely represented. We have been buying, I believe, everything in the English language which the law allows to circulate through the mails."

Mr. Barton interrupted with a smile.

"Not quite everything."

"Well, it's so close there's small difference. When you count it all up it comes to nearly a thousand dollars a year. Now, some of us have been visiting the magazine room during the last weeks, to see what use was

made of this large provision. It's about as we might have guessed. The worst magazines are read so much the covers are off and the pages are grimy. The worth while ones are hardly touched. I don't see that we've any right to waste the money of this community in pandering to the bad taste of the ignorant. This sub-committee would therefore suggest that we cancel all subscriptions, except for a few journals of undoubted quality."

His remarks evidently expressed the temper of the whole board, and without much discussion Mr. Barton secured a second to the motion. They were on the verge of putting it to a vote. It disturbed Mary that the only progress they were likely to accomplish that afternoon would be negative; their best achievement would be to throw something out of the library. Otherwise she might have agreed with him, since many magazines seemed to her hopelessly cheap.

"I think we ought to discuss this a moment, Mr. Barton," she said. "Perhaps there's another side to it."

Mr. Barton was not eager to have the meeting prolonged, but he indicated courteously enough that she had the floor.

"If everybody reads magazines which we happen not to care for, and if we like some which no one else wants to look at, it doesn't follow necessarily that only our magazines should be in the library. Most of us can and do subscribe to what we like. I rather guess that the journals we read have a small circulation. Now, though I don't always myself admire the other magazines, I think it important to ask how it is they have reached millions of readers."

The chairman of the finance committee interrupted rather aggressively.

"I think we know the answer, Mrs. Beauvel. They fill their pages with smut."

Several of the board applauded, and from the corner of her eye Mary saw that Mrs. Warren was on his side. With some warmth she continued her argument.

"You may be right, but I hate to believe that the majority of the people in our country and elsewhere prefer a magazine only because it's dirtier than another. The reason I would assign is quite different. We conservative people are satisfied with the solutions of life on which we were brought up. We like to read the magazines which assume, as we do, that somewhere in the world there are already good answers to all our problems."

She wondered if it was honest to associate herself with the conservatives, to pretend sympathy with their point of view, but the orator's impulse was strong in her to meet her audience at least half-way.

"Perhaps it would have been well for the rest of the world to have been brought up as we were, but apparently they have not been. In this country at least the majority of citizens now are out of contact with any of the inherited answers to life. It's greatly to their credit that they feel the need of some philosophy. They are most comfortable, I believe, with a system which starts from current facts as they are, without reference to tradition. It's in these magazines which are criticized that they find fresh attempts to deal with existence."

Her remarks made some impression. For a moment the board thought over what she had said, then the

spokesman of the finance committee returned to the attack.

"I don't recognize in what Mrs. Beauvel has said any accurate description of the magazines I object to. She may, of course, be more familiar with them than I am. My impression is, however, that they offer few answers to any problem. They owe their vogue to their devilish skill in getting something started where everything was all right before. They deal with just one subject, sex. Any person who has reached years of discretion knows that's nothing to talk of. If you haven't been well brought up at home, or at church, and if you don't know how to behave in decent society, then you're a subject not for literature but for the police—or at least for medical science. I shouldn't want a child of mine to read the kind of stories that get printed nowadays. Some people I know say that in our time matters were really worse, because children used to pick up information from each other, in nasty little stories whispered behind the barn. I can't see how the nasty little stories are improved by printing them in clear type with large illustrations. Here's what I mean."

He reached over for a magazine which evidently he had brought with him for emergency ammunition. Mary recognized the cover of the number containing Isabel's latest story.

"Here's what I mean," he continued. "Here's a lurid tale of two people who should have been married but weren't, and here's a picture of the two humbugs talking it over in what I suppose should be called one of their philosophic moments."

He opened the magazine to a full page illustration,

splendidly drawn, showing a man seated on the edge of a bed talking earnestly with a beautiful girl who lay back on the pillow. The artist had indicated with great success the thinness of her night-robe and the curve of the bosom on which it rested.

The spokesman of the finance committee challenged Mary.

"Now what would you call that?"

"Do you refer to the picture or the story?"

"Well, both."

"I haven't read the story," she said, "but you have."

Even Mr. Barton smiled a little at the insinuation.

"I wished to inform myself," said the spokesman.

"How does the story end?"

"It doesn't. It has no moral. There are two lunatics in it who get into a tight place and can't get out. There's not a thing in the story from which any one could learn—nothing but the dirt of it, and this picture of a half-naked woman."

"It seems to me," said Mary, "that a story has a kind of moral if it reports faithfully the sort of tight place from which there's no exit. As for the picture, perhaps you'll think my mind is warped, but I can't see anything wrong with it."

The spokesman of the finance committee raised his eyebrows.

"You can't, eh?"

"Why, it's nothing but a picture of a husband and wife talking together in the morning, I suppose, before she had got out of bed."

"As a matter of fact, it's at night."

"Well, at night then. If our boys and girls see that illustration, won't they know that their own fathers and mothers have good talks in their rooms, and that their mothers wear night-gowns?"

Several of the women tittered, and Mrs. Warren was openly amused.

"I hope my children don't think it of me," she said. "Not that kind of gown."

So many of the board imagined Mrs. Warren in the pose of the illustration that the meeting became difficult to control. The spokesman for the finance committee was growing impatient.

"I call for the question," he said. "There are still a few magazines about which we're all agreed. I named them in my motion—*The Atlantic Monthly, Scribner's, The Century* and the others. Some of us still think them interesting. Others don't. But any fool knows they're harmless."

At the unparliamentary language, Mr. Barton looked up sharply.

"The question is called for," he said. "All those in favor——"

The spokesman of the finance committee interrupted.

"With your permission, I'll add one more word for Mrs. Beauvel's benefit. The story I cited as illustration is one of the best in that magazine. There's another on the next page that's far worse, and it's written by a woman too. Her name is——"

He stopped, astonished at the coincidence, and Mary, understanding his confusion, enjoyed it.

"Her name is Isabel Beauvel," she said. "I've read

the story. She was my husband's first wife. You will be glad to know that she also has written for *The Atlantic Monthly.*

The spokesman of the finance committee had his breath taken away, and Mr. Barton looked for an excuse to lay the motion on the table, but when no one else came to his relief, Mary herself asked for a vote, and sat in silence while the others erased from their subscription lists all magazines except the harmless.

As they went out, the finance committee-man told her he would not have spoken of that story if he had known, and she said, with an effort toward pleasantry, that she understood, and it was quite all right—she would now have to subscribe to the magazine privately, and so would all its other admirers, and the circulation would go up.

III

But the discussion was most unpleasant, and when she got home she told Winthrop about it. She did not tell him, however, the deeper reasons why she was disturbed. It would have cost her no great effort to take the same point of view as the finance committee, for Isabel's story did seem to her futile, clever though it was and though she envied the experience that lay behind it. But if she should admit so much, what excuse was there left for her and Winthrop? Or putting it the other way, if they were doing the best they could, as she believed they were, ought she not to find a similar charity for the characters in the criticized stories? Life should be all of a piece, your own life and your neighbors', judged by the same standards, as it probably sprang from the same motives. She would have liked to tease the spokesman of the committee for having read that magazine so thoroughly. No doubt some of the others had read it too, the very ones who kept quiet and voted against it. But to accuse them of hypocrisy would not answer the question she was asking now about herself and Winthrop.

She was glad that in general he took her point of view.

"They're going at it the wrong way," he said, "emphasizing the very things they want the young people to overlook. But I do think that last remark of yours, Mary, went a little wide of the point—when you told him the readers would subscribe to the magazine per-

sonally and so run the circulation up. What if they should? He'd probably say that the library is not responsible for what the readers do at home. I think he'd be right. Since your board is spending money in the name of the community, you ought to represent their tastes."

"Could we, if we take away the magazines people most wish to read?"

"Well, the tastes then of the better educated, those who ought to know more."

She shook her head.

"Winthrop, you don't by any chance mean those who have the most money?"

Oddly enough, it may have been the casual mention of Isabel's name in the library meeting which induced him to take an interest in the town schools. What Mary had said earlier about their failure to make some constructive contribution to the life of their fellows, lingered upon his conscience, and what had been charged against his wife's story, according to Mary's report, or what the chairman had evidently been on the point of charging against it, coincided with his own convictions. He looked back now upon Isabel's venture into social philosophy as a silly and inadequate thing, a collection of half-truths which had misled her and him. Like many another good man, born to no extraordinary intellectual effort yet endowed with a sound heart and a desire to do his best, he had an instinctive respect for whatever wisdom had enabled greater men than he to play a creditable part. Tradition might be dull, but there were reasons for thinking it, on the whole, sound. Isabel simply didn't know enough to advise anybody about life, and if the young people were

taking her for a light, they'd soon stumble in the ditch, as he had done.

Mary evidently believed they ought to skim a rich sagacity from the top of their sufferings, and pass it around. Perhaps Mary could do something of the sort, since she had an excellent brain, but his own impulse was to leave wisdom to take care of itself, and see what he could do for health. The more he thought about it, the more he wished he might educate the bodies of the younger generation; their minds were already looked after—or if the boys and girls started with good health, a deep love of nature and outdoors, and the habit of competent sport, perhaps they wouldn't think too much, perhaps they could accept the placidity of a respectable life, without the qualms which had driven his wife out of her home.

But he was not drawing a lesson from her—he was merely reverting to the views he had held before she wrote the essay. For a short time he had tried to be an intellectual, had felt the urge of that thorough-going sincerity to which the essay had called his attention, had stretched his brain to the utmost in order to adjust Mary and himself to their shattered universe. But he was inclined now to rely on humbler things than philosophy, if philosophy was what Isabel had relied on, and specifically he was persuaded that it's easier to start being sincere than to stop afterward, when one has had enough. Isabel was probably still being sincere on the other side of the ocean, and Mary, as her debate in the library showed, had not yet recovered from the malady. He knew there was in his mood something of surrender and defeat, perhaps some enervating influence of the prosperity which was

coming upon him, but there was in it also a large mixture of truth, he was sure of that. Some folks would always have to do the work of the world, while the others —he hoped they would remain in the minority—were making experiments with their minds.

It was almost a year after the library meeting that this conviction of his emerged into action. He spoke to Mary about it one Sunday morning as they walked home from church, talking of the doctor's sermon. She found in it something to praise.

"Yes, it was good enough, Mary, but I'm more and more inclined to believe the world can't be made better by talk. I've even some doubts about education—your library and the kind of schools we have. Words that are printed are not for that reason wiser than words spoken, and most spoken words are pretty foolish, if you compare them with life."

"That sounds rather deep," she said. "Could you say it more simply?"

"I made a lot of money this last six months," he said, "and yesterday I bought some real estate at the north end of the town. It's in your name and mine, by the way, and the papers are in my safe at the office."

He paused a moment, but she said nothing. It was not the first time he had made investments in her name, and though she appreciated the generosity, she still disliked to accept his gifts. She would have been happier, if, like Isabel, she had been self-supporting.

"There was quite a bit of money left over," he went on, "and I'm thinking of giving it to the school board for a playground or a swimming pool or something of that sort. If you like, we'll present it together."

"It's your gift. I have nothing to do with it. But it's a fine idea."

"You see," he explained, "the town has done all it can afford to for their minds, yet half the men I talk to aren't sure modern schooling is worth much. The great point nowadays seems to be to teach the children to think, but once they get under way, nobody likes their thoughts. Half the effort is spent in stimulating them, and the other half in settling them again. If we ordinary men who have just brains enough to earn a living, said right out what we believe, we'd express doubt, to begin with, about the teachers who are training the youthful mind. As thinkers, very few of them seem to be world beaters."

Mary touched him on the arm, and he seized her elbow as though she had appealed to him for assistance through the traffic, but the gesture had been an instinctive protest.

"Winthrop, you're talking like seventy years old. What's happened to you?"

"I'm old all right, old enough. I'm going to offer them a swimming pool next week. I don't believe the smartest of them can be a philosopher and swim at the same time."

He did not foresee the reverberations of the gift. They would have been greater, of course, and not so pleasant, if at the same time he had explained his reasons for making it, but the note in which he offered the pool stated merely his interest in the physical well-being of the children of Harrington, and two of the local papers ran editorials commenting on his public spirit. The pool took time to build, and the architect found ways to make it cost more than Winthrop had expected, but he met the

expense cheerfully, and part of each day he inspected the work as it proceeded. Mary observed, with concealed amusement, that he who pretended to dislike philosophers, built up a philosophy around his own gift. At the dedication of the pool, a ceremony to which parents, politicians, and the graduating class of the high school were invited, his speech on the benefits of a sane body implied long and authoritative study of the subject. His neighbors were impressed. At the next election they voted him into the school board.

Mary did not let the honor go by without teasing.

"You see, you can't avoid the intellectual life if you wish, Winthrop. Now that you are in a position of responsibility for the younger generation, you'll be telling the children shortly what ideas it's dangerous for them to have."

She could see that he was disturbed at the possibility.

"I'll stick to what I know something about. There must be enough for me to do, merely looking after their games and exercise."

"Winthrop, you'll be a terrible materialist before you get through."

"Well, you can't scare me off with words. The doctor you call when you're sick, is a materialist—he's interested in the body."

For some time his new duties were agreeable. He now enjoyed the most satisfying perquisite of philanthropy, the appreciation from the people who are benefited. When he visited the playgrounds, or stopped in from time to time to see what was doing in the pool, the children recognized him, and smiled at their particular friend. They liked to talk with him, and he permitted

himself to enjoy frankly their adoration. The practical results, too, of this new work were satisfying. After a few months the pool was full, almost any school hour, with boys or girls bobbing in and out of the water like young frogs. Only a short while ago, he knew, they had been unable to swim at all. He wondered if the teachers of history or philosophy could point to any progress so specific.

It was satisfying, too, to have people stop him in general gatherings, in his business clubs, or at the church, to let him know what pleasure their children had from his munificence. He was on the way to be the patron saint of Harrington youth, and to have the affection of the very young was, as he now for the first time learned, the most stimulating kind of praise. Hitherto children had never occupied his thoughts. Isabel's decision to devote her talents to literature rather than to a family had been for him almost as much a relief as a disappointment. In their early married life he had thought of babies from the least complimentary angle. Too many of his friends had infants who insisted on being ill at unlucky times, when the parents had engagements which should not have been broken; or the little wretches would inevitably start crying in public places. They were the curse of railway cars. The parental ordeal of patience and devotion he had for these reasons been willing to forego. But now he began to appreciate the charm which adds itself to children at a slightly later age. He wished he might have had several youngsters of his own, not babies, of course, but healthy things further along, beginning, perhaps, at the fourth or fifth year. From that fancy he drifted by inevitable degrees into blaming Isabel for his

childlessness. She had been too selfish, he now saw, to face the inconveniences which, after all, are woman's duty. If only it were right for Mary and for him to bring a child into the world!

His first gift, then, to the cause of purely physical education, what was intended to be merely a vigorous protest against the over-intellectualizing of life, produced in him at last a sentimental attitude toward his own career, a humoring of himself in tragic or at least pathetic moods. He who shunned philosophy was now beginning to lead an emotional inner life, the pleasure of which was woven out of self-pity and melancholy, and the conviction that no one, not even Mary, had had the experience necessary to understand him.

Like Mary, he found committee meetings on the whole disappointing. The other members of the board he soon noticed had no more vital concern with the intellectual life than he. They also had but slight interest in his kind of education. They were conscientious men who wished to see that the children of the town had opportunity. Their training on directors' boards had taught them to trust experts, and the availability of experts was an excuse for putting little thought on any matter themselves. In general they did whatever the principals had recommended to the superintendent, and the superintendent had endorsed. To be sure, the cost of education bothered them somewhat; they acted in an authoritative capacity most often when they reminded the superintendent of the limits of the town purse. The meetings, at such moments, bored him profoundly. Attendance on them he considered was the price to be paid for the privilege of serving the children elsewhere.

But a full year after he had entered upon these duties, an incident occurred which made the board meeting too lively—it paralleled Mary's experience in the library. He expected her sympathy when they were alone that night.

"You are not the only one to have embarrassing questions put up to you," he began. "I'll admit I didn't realize how awkward this kind of thing is."

"You haven't yet told me what happened."

"Well, I admit I am taking a chance in reporting it—you can tease me all you like. I've become a champion of the intelligentsia."

"Are they as badly off as that?"

But she saw that the episode, whatever it was, couldn't be laughed at.

"What happened, Winthrop?"

"There's been a complaint, more than one, in fact, about the reading the high school children are asked to do. The superintendent says he put the first of such letters in the waste-basket, but they're coming along quite steadily, and he thought he ought to report to us."

Mary interrupted impatiently.

"Those interminable committee meetings! If he knows his business, why doesn't he say what the children should read, and have done with it? Surely he can't expect the whole board to regulate the course in detail."

"It's not so simple as that. There are other people in the community who like what their children are reading, and they've begun to write in, too. As Miller says, this correspondence must be symptomatic of a discussion that's gathering headway among the parents. He gives his opinion that if it continues, it may become an issue in his administration, perhaps at the next election,

and he felt he ought to inform us of what was happening, and why the debate couldn't be ended arbitrarily. You know that young girl you spoke of last year, the one who has such remarkable success in stimulating the children to use the library?"

"Elizabeth Briggs?"

"That's the name. She's at the bottom of the whole trouble. Mr. Barton picked her out, you remember, and at first the extraordinary results she got made her rather a marked person. Barton is prepared to stand behind her through thick and thin. He says he's never met so good a teacher in her field. Her students adore her. As a matter of fact, the complaints seem to come from parents whose children are not yet under her care, but may be later."

Mary interrupted.

"I don't see what right they have to interfere, if her work is satisfactory."

"Superintendent Miller says there's another factor in the problem, which might as well be recognized. She's the youngest teacher in the system, and it's natural that the others should be jealous. Perhaps it's from them that the complaints arise, but anyway it's said that she's giving the children books which excite them in unwholesome ways, that their curiosity to read other books, even those not required in their work, is a bad sign, that she's doing, in short, a rather cheap thing, avoiding the masterpieces which just because they are conventional are hard to make attractive, and filling the youngsters up with the kind of intellectual red pepper which the adolescent palate craves."

Mary laughed.

"The metaphor sounds terrifying. Did they tell you what she makes them read?"

"She doesn't have to make them—that's the point. Miller gave us a list of the books she's studying in one of the advanced courses. I don't recall all of it, but it did seem to be a kind of literary waste-basket. There was a novel by a Russian—his name begins with *D.*"

"Dostoievsky?"

"That's the fellow. One of the board asked what it was about, and the superintendent told him it was rather grim and frank, one of those naturalistic things. Then there was a novel by Hardy and one by Meredith. They're not so bad, of course. And that book of George Moore's, *Esther.*"

"Esther Waters?"

"That's it. Wasn't it suppressed somewhere once? Anyway, they're reading that. Then she threw in a little standard poetry—Tennyson's *Maud,* I remember, and three Shakespeare tragedies. Some of the men laughed at the mention of those in that queer company."

Mary was puzzled.

"How on earth could you find anything to discuss in that list? The books are in all the public libraries."

"Well, one of the letters Miller read to us, put it pretty plainly. The father of two girls wrote that literature, in his opinion, was one of the graces of life, one of the higher amusements, like any other art. His children would find out soon enough the real problems of life. A good course in literature, he ventured to say, ought to make them happy and sane, instead of suggesting morbid thoughts. In fact, he didn't think the best literature ought to suggest thoughts at all. That was the proper

work of philosophy. As a taxpayer he insisted on a radical change before his girls were submitted to unhealthy books which would take the bloom off their youth and undermine their innocence. They ought to read, he said, only the things which are cheerful and easy. Those were his very words."

"And what did you wise folk say to all that?"

"Well, the board found it a hard nut to crack. Most of them agreed with the father, and for a moment I thought they were going to order a change in the reading list. Miller surprised them a little by his attitude. He said nothing could be more satisfactory to him personally than to have such a vote, but he was bound to tell us that this situation was arising in other places in the United States, even where there wasn't an Elizabeth Briggs to focus the attack on, and wherever the authorities had taken a firm hand and called for safe old-fashioned things, there had been a nasty row. One of the board flared up at that and told him that where convictions are involved, one should be prepared to fight. Miller grinned rather wickedly and said that's why he preferred to go slowly—he wanted time for the necessary preparation. When they asked what he meant, he said they'd have to forgive him if he inquired how many of the board had read these books which they were ready to throw out. He wasn't trying to be cantankerous, he explained, but that question was sure to be asked by the opposition, and it always put the authorities in a mean hole, to admit they had criticized books they hadn't read."

"I didn't know Miller had such malice in him! Does he want the board to take a course with Miss Briggs, to see whether it damages your morals?"

"It comes to about that. And he told us one other thing, that if we went over the heads of the teachers, and censored the reading list, we'd have to say what sort of list we wanted in its place, and he declined the responsibility of drawing up any list which everybody would call "cheerful and easy." Some of the parents, he added, had been careful not to say anything against Dostoievsky because they weren't sure what his book was like, but they insisted on leaving out *Hamlet.* One woman complained that the way Hamlet talked to Ophelia, and the way Ophelia babbled when she went mad, was the filthiest stuff that ever polluted a page. Miller says he'd rather not suppress Shakespeare, though perhaps the woman could make out a case."

"I suppose you all remembered those passages?"

Winthrop smiled.

"We sat still and looked as serious as possible, to show our familiarity with Shakespeare."

"Well, where does it stand now?"

"They referred it to a sub-committee."

"That relieves you, at least for the time being."

"No, I'm on the committee."

"You, Winthrop? Does it involve physical education?"

He looked a bit sheepish.

"I got myself into it. One of the authors she had them reading was Ibsen. I admitted I knew nothing about the Russians, but said I'd vote to take Ibsen off, because his plays have made lots of trouble, and would do it again. That put me almost at the head of the class in foreign literature."

Mary began to laugh.

"Then I suppose you'll have to read up. Poor fellow!"

"No, I'm serious. I need your help. I haven't the faintest idea how to go about it."

She thought a moment.

"What does Elizabeth Briggs say to all this? Have they told her of the complaints?"

"Miller told Barton, and Barton stood up for her, but of course he passed on the news. Miller hasn't talked with her directly, as yet, not wishing to go behind Barton's back, but he understands she's stubborn—is sure she's right."

"I suppose your committee will talk with her?"

Apparently he had not thought of that.

"Do you suppose we ought to? That would make us a sort of umpire in the quarrel, wouldn't it?"

"What else are you?"

He looked uncomfortable.

"If the board decides eventually to do something she won't like, it will be downright unpleasant to have any dealings with her personally. I don't think the committee would want that. We'll just consider the case on its merits."

"How timid you men are!"

"Well, if you were in my place, how would you go about it?"

"I'll ask her to dinner next Sunday. Let's find out together what her point of view is."

IV

The nearer the day came for meeting the young woman, the less Winthrop liked the prospect. Business became a refuge from the worry; as he went about his duties in the office, questions of education and of literary influence dropped completely from his thought, but at night, when he returned to the house, he remembered his unlucky responsibility for the younger generation. He was very sorry that he must discuss the matter further, first with this young teacher, and later with his colleagues on the board. By Sunday noon he had built up a positive dislike of Miss Briggs.

His prejudice against meeting her was different from the feeling he might have had, had his own life been entirely conventional. Narrow though he was in some respects, the fault lay with circumstances rather than with any innate prejudice. He had none of that instinctive hostility to strange ideas or to the opinion of others, which marks the truly narrow-minded. The difficulty he encountered now lay in his sensitiveness to self-criticism. He couldn't talk about this foreign literature, this Ibsen and the rest of it, without thinking of Isabel and the disaster to their home. He had expected from the first that society would keep reminding him of his embarrassment. He now found that he had an involuntary dislike for those who did the reminding. Several times he was on the point of telling Mary of his reluctance to question Elizabeth Briggs about the reading list, but

Mary, he knew, was determined, and theoretically at least, she was right. The teacher deserved a hearing.

As noon approached, he found himself that Sunday a bit nervous, and when the clock went on past the hour he began to cherish the ridiculous hope that something might prevent her from coming. But she rang the door-bell, twenty minutes late.

"I'm awfully sorry, Mrs. Beauvel. Some one came in just as I was starting out, and delayed me. You'll think me rude."

"It's quite all right. You know Mr. Beauvel, don't you? One of your educational betters."

"Miss Briggs doesn't know I am one of her betters, Mary, and it's the first time I've had the pleasure of meeting her."

The girl surprised him somewhat. He had not speculated about her personality, but it had been reasonable to look for something over-energetic, nervous, perhaps a little strident. Every reference to her had suggested dynamic force, the power to inflame. What he saw before him was a slight girl, slender, with dark hair, bobbed but not too boyishly—in fact, fluffed out into a feminine softness. The gown she wore of light blue was charmingly modest. He noticed the simple effect of the collar, drawn close to her throat by a silken cord. Her black eyes were dreamy rather than brilliant, her voice was unusually well-bred, without the slightest suggestion of having been consciously trained. Whatever else she might prove to be, this young woman was evidently far removed from the proverbial school-teacher, from the impulse to dogmatize, from the habit of posing as wiser or more correct than her fellows. She was the very last person he

would have suspected of stubbornness over a reading list.

"We might as well go right in to the table," said Mary. "Maggie is ready for us."

Winthrop held the chair for Miss Briggs and then for Mary. He was wondering how they could approach the subject they expected to discuss. It would be natural, he saw, to confine themselves to social topics of another sort.

"You've a charming home here, Mrs. Beauvel. I noticed the garden when I came in. In summer it must be lovely."

"It is. Are you fond of gardening yourself?"

The girl laughed.

"I'm naturally lazy. Gardening has always seemed attractive, but I haven't risked the illusion by doing any of it."

"Mr. Beauvel will be wondering whether you're interested in sports."

The question annoyed him slightly. It was as though Mary wished to plunge at once into the discussion. He saw it all coming—swimming tank, school board, reading list. The girl would probably say she liked to swim.

"I like games, but I'm not particularly good at them, Mrs. Beauvel. At home I used to ride, but of course I can't afford a horse here."

"You don't swim, I suppose?" said Winthrop.

Like a novice on a bicycle, he was hypnotized by the dangerous tree.

"Yes, I do, but I haven't been in your tank yet, Mr. Beauvel. That was a splendid gift to the children!"

"Well, it was nothing very important, but perhaps it helps."

Mary spoke up loyally.

"I think it *is* important. We literary folk can appreciate the other side of education, can't we, Miss Briggs?"

So far the conservation impressed Winthrop as rather stiff. For a while he stayed out of the talk and let Mary and Elizabeth drift through discussions of local boarding houses, and dry-goods stores, and the limitations of towns no larger than Harrington, so far as music and the theater were concerned. Mary, too, he thought, was embarrassed, though she pretended not to be. She might as well struggle along unaided.

But toward the end of the meal it was he who brought up the subject he had intended to avoid. It was in an awkward silence, just before the salad.

"Miss Briggs, I'm glad of an opportunity to ask you about the reading your youngsters do."

She looked at him fearlessly—even, he thought, with some slight amusement.

"Of course I know why I'm here, Mr. Beauvel. The books my children have been reading are thought dangerous. It's really good of you to let me explain."

"Oh, I'm not pretending to sit in judgment on you."

The amusement in her face seemed to him more marked.

"Isn't that exactly what you must do? There's a rumor you're one of the committee on the board to report on me."

Her directness made him feel something of a hypocrite. It would have been better in the first place to summon her for a formal inquiry rather than let Mary invite her casually to the house and question her afterward.

"Oh, I hope we shan't be making a formal report, but I'm glad you know of the discussion on the board. Some of the parents say you ask the children to read what isn't good for them. You understand that in a democracy like ours, where the parents are the taxpayers and elect the school authorities, in the long run we have to do what is satisfactory to them, or what can be made satisfactory by intelligent explanation. Perhaps you can teach me your point of view so clearly that we can pass it on to the parents."

When Mary looked at him across the table, he felt ashamed. She knew that originally he had been neither so magnanimous nor so intelligent as his words now would indicate. Elizabeth Briggs followed their eyes, and looked from one to the other.

"I don't really believe, Mr. Beauvel, that anybody can convince the sort of parent who makes that objection. For one thing, they haven't read the books themselves, and if they did read them, they'd be determined not to understand."

Mary interrupted.

"That's a little hard, isn't it?"

"I'm afraid it's true, Mrs. Beauvel. They could understand if they wished, but you know how it is, few people could remain comfortable if they began to think."

She spoke as though the idea were a truism. Partly because he knew the words were meant for him, Winthrop objected.

"I don't get that, Miss Briggs. Of course your experience is a more intellectual one than mine, and when you speak of thinking, you may mean something more subtle than I should. But the men I deal with in business

use their brains, I should say, and the average person has an adequate supply of thoughts. We all have about the same natural inheritance."

She answered with complete ease, not as though the discussion had any great bearing on her destiny, nor as though she wished to persuade him, but by way of exchanging amicable opinions.

"Perhaps I used the word in too narrow a sense, but all parents, I believe, agree with educators that children should have something more than the average supply of ideas. They should know what use to make of their thoughts, and they should learn how to gather ideas by observation, and how to measure the value both of the fact and of the idea based on the fact. Isn't that what we mean by teaching them to think? But few parents themselves wish to do that kind of thinking, and they are unwilling for their children to learn; they merely pretend they believe in intelligence. Some of us have reason to know that objections raised by parents are the best testimony to the success of our profession—evidence that the children are beginning to use their minds in the home."

"Well, even at that, Miss Briggs, can't you teach them to think while they are reading the great masterpieces? The classics aren't devoid of ideas, are they? Most of the criticism is directed, I fancy, at this foreign stuff, which really has little to do with American life."

Mary interrupted.

"Shall we have our coffee in the living room? I was hoping Miss Briggs would tell us what good it would do the children to read even the classics."

They went across the hall, and since Maggie was fol-

lowing with the coffee tray, they attended for a moment to sugar and cream. Elizabeth Briggs showed no more eagerness to resume the talk than she had to start it. She picked up a magazine from the table.

"Good for you, Mr. Beauvel!" she said. "You patronize suppressed literature."

It was the magazine to which Isabel contributed.

"Mrs. Beauvel subscribes to that."

"And she's on the library committee herself! Mrs. Beauvel, I recognize a kindred spirit."

Mary laughed as much at the expression on Winthrop's face as at Elizabeth's remark.

"Let's go back to the classics," she said. "I was hoping you'd tell us what these boys and girls in Harrington in this year of grace, 1929, can get out of the works of William Shakespeare."

Elizabeth answered promptly.

"Very little, Mrs. Beauvel, and that's nothing against Shakespeare either. They get the story, of course, but the stories in Shakespeare are the weakest part, don't you think? More than one child has complained that the plots are melodramatic. They get some of the characters, of course, but they're sure to miss profound things which older folks guess at, after they've studied history. Shakespeare's time is far away from my children. What they can understand in him, naturally, is the picture of those parts of life which we think about to-day—that is, which we are trained to observe and to discuss. I mean, they really like in Shakespeare just what their parents object to their reading about in modern books."

She stopped to sip her coffee.

"And the funny thing, Mr. Beauvel, when you come

to think of it, is that the parents would agree with me if they ever read either Shakespeare or the moderns."

Mary laughed again, and Winthrop knew she was siding with the girl.

"I confess I haven't read much," he said. "I don't know which those things are in Shakespeare which you say are so out of date."

"Well, take *Othello* and *King Lear* for instance. They are as famous as anything he wrote, and almost everybody knows the plots."

"Even I have read those two plays."

She ignored his sarcasm.

"The children can't understand why Othello had to strangle his wife. I suppose Shakespeare's audience thought that a gentleman could do nothing else, if his wife loved another man, but the children here in Harrington think he had an exaggerated notion of duty. Confess, Mr. Beauvel, you agree with them. If you thought your wife wanted to leave you, your first impulse wouldn't be to strangle her, would it?"

He added a lump of sugar.

"And King Lear insisted upon giving away his property, and then wandered from house to house objecting to the way they treated him. Most children, I find, sympathize with the bad daughters in the play, who made the old man move on. The modern youngster thinks he was not only a terrible fool but a bore."

She waited for Winthrop to question her further, but he had nothing more to ask.

Mary helped her out.

"You spoke of some things in Shakespeare which young people recognize as modern."

Elizabeth smiled.

"If I tell Mr. Beauvel, he'll probably take away my job. I was thinking of *Measure for Measure.*"

Winthrop searched his memory.

"I confess I'm a bit vague there. What's it about?"

"About a lot of people who aren't behaving very well, some of them young, some of them middle-aged. There's a man in authority who tries to change nature by force, and he ends by behaving more wickedly than the others."

"And that's modern, eh?"

"One of my boys said it was just like Prohibition."

For the first time in the conversation Mary was startled.

"You don't mean that you asked them to read *Measure for Measure?*"

"It's not on the list, Mrs. Beauvel, but I mentioned it as one of the wonderful tragedies, and most of them looked it up."

"I suppose," said Mary, "you didn't tell them their elders would disapprove?"

"Yes, I did. I said most people thought the subject matter too strong for even the modern stage."

Winthrop was caught off his guard.

"That's no way to keep them from reading it!"

She turned on him that fearless, amused glance of hers.

"I knew it wasn't, Mr. Beauvel."

He was not enjoying the talk. So far it had developed nothing that he could act upon, for the guidance of the committee, and in some respects it had been rather scattered and ineffectual. Yet, to be fair, if the girl said nothing of importance, on the other hand he had been

able to think of no epoch-making questions. These educational problems needed an expert.

"Miss Briggs, I wish you'd tell me what you would do if the board ordered you to change the list."

"Oh, I'd change it. There are plenty of great books in the world."

"But suppose we objected to your next choice?"

"Mr. Beauvel, I really think I'd keep on changing until there were no great books left. Then I'd stop teaching."

This wasn't the answer the board would expect, and polite though it seemed, some of the men wouldn't like it. Evidently she intended to give them no opportunity to discipline her.

"I'm surprised," he said. "It didn't occur to me that a rebel like you could turn docile."

Now she was roused at last—he caught a flash in the dreamy eyes.

"You call this docile? You're quite wrong, Mr. Beauvel, and you make a mistake to think me a rebel. One can't be a rebel unless there's some opposition, and I've never found difficulty in doing what I thought best."

He mistook her quiet tone for impertinence.

"My congratulations," he said.

"But I really never did! My father and mother gave me the happiest of homes. I remember nothing there against which I wished to react."

"Are they living still?" said Mary.

"No, I'm quite alone now."

"And you've always done as you wished?"

"Not quite, of course, but always what in the circumstances seemed best. Mr. Warren wanted me to tell the

superintendent I'd give up the modern books on the list, so long as I could keep on with the Shakespeare. But it seemed wrong to send a message even so gently threatening as that, and it really isn't necessary. You know, Mr. Beauvel——"

She took him into her confidence with a quick smile.

"One can teach the same thing, no matter what the book is. So long as I can talk to the children at all, I hope to make them want to read and want to think."

For the first time he saw the symptoms of the propagandist. She did feel, then, that she had a mission.

"Would you consider me very obtuse if I sided a little with those parents who would rather not have the children think about problems, unless the solution is suggested at the same time? What's the good of bothering them with a problem when you know you can't solve it? Won't that make the children morbid, as their parents claim?"

In spite of himself her reply impressed him with its obvious integrity.

"That's all very well, Mr. Beauvel, in cases where the solution has been found, but if the solutions haven't yet been found, they must be the work at last of a new generation. They'll never solve it at all if you teach them it's wrong to know the problem exists. And even if they can't solve it any more than their forefathers, don't you think an educated person should be familiar with the unsolved things, should know just where knowledge stops?"

Rather than meet her challenge fairly, he shifted his ground.

"I fancy that what the parents worry about is that

modern problems are usually mixed with the question of sex, and such questions are bad for the adolescent child. Mature people can consider them calmly."

"Can they?" she asked him. "I said I never had anything to rebel against, but when I was still in that adolescent age which you think should be protected, some people slightly older than I, of whom I was very fond, got caught in one of those tangles which we don't yet know how to prevent nor solve. Their education had been of the prudent kind—nobody had told them what life is like. I made up my mind then that even if I couldn't avoid the things which bring trouble to other human beings, at least I'd rather not approach existence as though it were one prolonged accident. As little as possible do I wish to be taken by surprise. I was terribly sorry for those two people; their suffering, as much as anything, made me go into teaching."

He could hit on no answer at all. What she was saying now was either quite harmless or else very dangerous, but unfortunately it sounded reasonable. Of course she was over-estimating the intelligence of her pupils; the cheerful young animals who swam around in his pool never suggested themselves as likely prophets of a new and wiser day, at least not in the area of such misfortunes as he and Isabel and Mary had got into.

"Thank you for talking so freely, Miss Briggs. May I report to the committee what you said?"

"Of course. And I'll tell them the same things, if they care to question me. I should hate to have any of you think I am trying to create an issue, or play the martyr. Whenever you cease to want me, say so and I'll go. There are other places to teach in."

"Oh, it won't come to anything so tragic as that, I am sure."

The girl shook her head.

"Do you know, Mr. Beauvel, I think it will come to just that, sooner or later. But I am prepared, and shan't misinterpret it."

"It won't come to that," he protested, "not unless some of these children of yours take too literally the stuff you have them read. If they begin to make experiments which aren't popular, and if you're the one that started them off, of course you'll have to answer for it, but since you're willing to consider changes on the reading list, I foresee we shall get on well together."

She shook her head again.

"It's nice of you to talk that way, but I'd rather you didn't deceive yourself about me. I really hope that the children, as many of them as have character or brains enough, will apply in their lives the ideas they get in their education. Their parents will surely not like it, but how else can the world progress? And isn't it rather silly of you to pay me for teaching if you hope none of it will have any practical effect?"

"You don't by any chance," he began, "wish them to be——"

He had begun the question before he realized.

"Be what, Mr. Beauvel?"

"I was going to say, you're not trying to make them sincere, are you?"

"I shouldn't object if they were."

"Well, you're dangerous, then. I'll warn the board."

She liked his good-natured banter, and when she left she thanked them for hospitality which she con-

fessed had turned out pleasanter than she had foreseen.

"I thought you were going to give me a terrible dressing down, Mr. Beauvel. See, I brought my resignation with me, in my handbag."

He gave her a fatherly pat on the shoulder as she went out the door.

"Put it in the waste-basket."

But when she was gone, when he turned to Mary, the cordial cheerfulness disappeared from his eyes.

"That was a dull hour," he said. "I've never enjoyed anything less. She's taking herself too seriously."

Mary patted him on the back, much as he had encouraged Elizabeth.

"I thought it was a little hard on you," she said. "On me too, perhaps."

V

If the talk with Elizabeth ended for both Winthrop and Mary with a good many issues still undefined, the conclusion of the whole case was even less satisfying. The teacher's willingness to accept criticism, the reasonable manner in which she answered questions, disarmed her enemies, at least for the moment. She repeated to the committee what she had said to Winthrop, that if they wished to dispense with her services, she was prepared to resign, but she added with equal frankness that she'd like to stay. The board voted to leave the whole matter in the hands of the superintendent, and though the angry parents circulated the rumor that Elizabeth had been reprimanded, the books which the children now read gave color to the conflicting legend that she had been promoted. The quarrel smoldered, and sooner or later, both sides knew, it would break out again.

The part that Winthrop had taken in the dispute left in him a deep moral wound. In the committee, as at his own dinner table, his hands, as it were, were tied. Whatever course he might have chosen, for or against the teacher, seemed absurd when he remembered the strange life he was concealing from his respectable neighbors—his joyless adventure in morals, which they would think less pardonable than anything recorded in Elizabeth's dangerous books. Had it only been his own career, he told himself, he could have come to some clear decision, but with each passing season he took more to heart what

he owed to Mary. In this new circle of friends she had made him comfortable and herself popular, with the quiet charm of her personality and her loyal care of his home, but she was no happier than he. She was too proud and too honorable to hide from him that she read Isabel's stories as they were published, and he knew that in the reading there was some envy, since her own writing had ceased. He could not avoid the conviction that while she was listening to Elizabeth Briggs she had been thinking of her freedom, only a few years ago, when she too could have planned her life from hour to hour without the sense of fetters. To all intents and purposes she was suffering the disadvantages of matrimony with none of the reward, and with the added handicap of their secret. In the quarrel over the reading list, she too, no doubt, would have preferred to take some definite stand—she would have defended Elizabeth. But circumstances were too strong for both and they did nothing. When the trouble blew over temporarily, they made a point of seeing the girl from time to time, and grew fond of her, but in spite of the affection, when she was in their house Winthrop felt uneasy, and knew without being told that Mary also was conscious of her false position. Elizabeth was too young to take into their confidence, but even if she had been older, the secret was too dangerous to share, and so long as they knew she saw in them what they were not, they remained to some extent mere spectators of her life, on the outside of the friendship she would have opened to them.

The next three or four years passed without dramatic punctuation of any sort. They were reminded of Isabel by her stories, but after Winthrop had declined to col-

laborate in the divorce, she wrote no more letters, and they lost all trace of her. His work on the school board became perfunctory, but as his wealth increased, he added further gifts, and in time accepted his rôle as leading citizen and generous patron. Outwardly he was a successful man. He had even ceased to grieve over the gradual drying up of certain impulses in him, perhaps in Mary too, which they once had thought essential to a good life. It would be harder for them now to defend an unconventional person, or a freak of conduct, even though they believed it essentially right. The good opinion of their fellows, which had imparted courage at the critical moment of their arrival in Harrington, and which Mary had risked ever so slightly by championing the modern magazines, they had now grown to depend on. This last stage of their decline, this slow deadening of the heart, had overtaken them imperceptibly. Their conduct was beyond reproach, but as much as it could be true of an admirable man and woman, their souls and their minds were slumbering.

But even toward the end of this decline some sparks of her old self lightened Mary's thoughts from time to time. She was slower than Winthrop to succumb. For example, she had a bad hour of self-examination when Mrs. Warren, a little stouter, with a few more gray hairs, had inveigled her into attending the missionary society. One of the most successful missionaries, Mrs. Warren promised, would give the ladies a graphic account of his work in Polynesia, with the very modern aid of moving pictures. It was perhaps the film which made it easy for Mary to accept. The conventional work of the churches, especially their missionary efforts, she always

thought of with distant respect—at least she was sure of the distance, and she tried to be sure of the respect, but never in her life had she felt it her burning duty to convert people to think as she did. However, if Mrs. Warren wished her to go, it was easier to say yes than to refuse.

The missionary was more prepossessing than she had thought probable—a cultured man, well informed in world politics, alert to trade possibilities for the United States in the East, and equipped by temperament and study to understand the tribal customs which he was trying to displace, in order to make room for the religion in which he himself was a rather liberal believer. It occurred to Mary that he might possibly think himself out of it at one end before he had drawn the natives in at the other.

The first part of his lecture bristled with statistics of population, of church membership and of expenses. It struck her that the apostolic note was lacking, and that the ladies around her did not grieve over its absence, but she reminded herself that they, better grounded in religion than she, could take for granted the spiritual basis. The missionary, in other words, was not expected to preach religion at home. After the talk came the film.

It showed a series of native scenes, with the natives in their original unconverted state, and then, of course, by way of contrast, in their present condition, after civilization had done its work. Mary couldn't avoid the conclusion that what the other women, as well as herself, liked best, was the picture of the natives before they had been saved. As the film disclosed them at household tasks or in the open air, hunting and fishing, beautiful

men and women with bronze skins, naked and unashamed, the audience gasped with admiration, and the missionary pointed out the admirable physical endowment of these wonderful people. Apparently because they were brown and not white, their nudity was not offensive, or perhaps it was because they were not yet converted, and therefore could be excused. But it occurred to Mary that the missionary circle gave her the opportunity to enjoy a picture of mankind such as the censor would hesitate to permit for the general public, and she wondered if Mrs. Warren shared the unorthodox wish which came to her, to visit that part of the world and see for herself, before the conversion should be complete.

She left the meeting disturbed by such thoughts as these; they were too youthful, too irresponsible. The world's work, she knew, must be carried on, and whatever one believed good in civilization should be pushed to the ends of the earth. Winthrop thought so—Doctor Warren—everybody. It was probably some lack of faith in herself rather than in the world she lived in which made her envy the primitive society she had just looked at. And it was too easy to make the sort of gibe at the censor which had occurred to her; the general public wouldn't take such pictures in the right mood, but nothing could be more proper for intelligent and high-minded women such as these among whom she had just been a guest.

On the way home she stopped to pay a visit she owed weekly at the hospital. Some of her friends in the library had interested her in the psychopathic ward, and when she wasn't helping to raise money for the work, she spared a moment to visit the patients, or to talk with the

doctors. The older citizens in Harrington had seen the need of an out-and-out lunatic asylum, but had been reluctant to spend money on a hospital department in which the patients were only half and half. Mary had gladly joined the advanced group which wanted modern treatment for even the slightest sickness of the mind. She knew that the doctor in charge, young Arthur Starforth, found encouragement in her sympathy. He liked to pour out his ideas, and in Harrington there were few listeners.

That afternoon he harped on one subject.

"Mrs. Beauvel, I wish you could get your husband interested in this work. It's nearer his line than he knows. Any society, to keep quite sane, must spend far more hours in the open air—in sports, if you choose—than we Americans think necessary. And I wish we could get him to see the value of something a little above the sports, of the manual crafts, for example, the arts in which people use their bodies. Patients here, and many of your fellow citizens who ought to be patients, are victims of this inventive age of ours, where the machines, saving us from labor, also come between us and exercise. If I had my way, every boy and girl would have to do something with the hands. We'd make education center around an art or a craft. We'd take labor away from the so-called working class, and transpose it into an expression of spirit and character. It discourages me to see that most of the things we prescribe for these lop-sided victims, are what people used to do normally in a healthier age."

What he said made her think of the naked savages at the missionary society. The film had shown them at

their homely tasks, cheerful as though they were engaged in a sport. Nothing had been said about mental diseases among them, though the missionary had remarked that they were childlike, and in the unconverted condition their intelligence was not high. Perhaps that's what Winthrop had been feeling after, when he wished he could no longer think.

Doctor Starforth continued his plea for the reeducation of society, but this afternoon it was hard to listen to him. No doubt he was right, as no doubt the missionary had been, each in their way, but they both were engaged in a kind of propaganda. She saw that, with sudden clearness. And neither illustrated that peace with the universe which they hoped would be achieved if their ideas were successful. . . . What queer thoughts were these! She was ashamed of herself. Of course the doctor's work was invaluable. He couldn't have peace with this universe so long as service remained to render. Perhaps one could say as much for the missionary, if one took the trouble to understand.

"What would you like my husband to do, Doctor?"

"It doesn't matter where we begin, Mrs. Beauvel. Anything at all, so long as we teach people the value of a sane life, in which all the faculties are exercised."

"I dare say Winthrop would like to help, but he wouldn't feel called to do any teaching. He might help in the schools. What would you propose there?"

The doctor looked disappointed.

"We can't hope for much from the schools, Mrs. Beauvel. They're too stereotyped. If the grown folks won't avail themselves of scientific knowledge, the modern world is lost."

His despondency was impressive.

"I know what to tell Winthrop," she said. "You need a vacation, Doctor. Your patients are not cheerful company. We'll have to let you go away for a while and recover your optimism."

He protested against that diagnosis of his case, and when she had tired of his tense seriousness, she excused herself and went on home. What a depressing afternoon! Perhaps this melancholy which had come on her all at once was due to these unexpected compulsions to think once more, as Miss Briggs would say. Taken together, the missionary and the doctor had been too stimulating. Was there truth in what each had said? If she understood the prime motives which had sent the missionary into his exile, he thought civilization must die unless it kept propagating itself. His work was quite as important for the country at home as for the natives who were to receive the light. If you didn't spread truth, you couldn't keep it for yourself. And the doctor, who probably cared little about religion, found something essential in the drudgery which the modern world was trying to escape. If she were to confess to the missionary the tangle into which Winthrop, Isabel and she had fallen, perhaps he would say they might have escaped if at the moment, instead of thinking of their own lives, they had been trying to spread the gospel among the heathen, and perhaps the doctor would think that she and Isabel would have been safe had they been scrubbing floors, and Winthrop chopping wood. She really didn't believe either, yet the two philosophies surely represented the best available wisdom in the world. It was discouraging.

As she walked back, for the first time in this all-but-decade spent with Winthrop, she thought of their home from an uncomplimentary standpoint, as though she were one of those happy, comfortable wives about whom Isabel had written in the essay. Winthrop would expect her for dinner, and she counted on him, of course. In the beginning they had assured each other complete freedom, but once a human habit establishes itself, what freedom remains? She was returning to an evening which would be devoid of all unpleasantness, but not on that account the less dull. They would talk a little, she would tell him about the missionary and what the doctor had said, he would give her the city news and report which of their friends he had run into during the day. Some time just before eleven he would yawn and then beg her pardon, and she would say he must be weary after accomplishing so much since breakfast, and then he would go to bed. Since there was a new story of Isabel's just out, she would probably wait up for half an hour to glance at it. That little insincerity was out of deference to his feelings. He knew the story was there, because she left it upon the table, but she preferred not to read it under his eyes. . . .

But the evening proved more eventful than she had hoped. It ushered in the last of the episodes which indicated for him and for her how far they had gone in the logic of their impulsive sincerity. The illumination came unannounced, as is the way with angelic visitations. It came just after dinner in the form of Doctor Warren, friendly as usual, but in manner slightly subdued.

"Beauvel, I've a troublesome question, which I'd like

to run away from. You'll hate me for wishing it on you, but I could think of no one more likely to be helpful than you and your wife."

"Well, that sounds formidable, Doctor. What's the matter?"

Winthrop hadn't noticed how grave the minister was, but his words had struck a premonition in Mary. She drew her chair near and sat up quite straight, ready for a shock. It crossed her mind that perhaps Doctor Warren had heard their story and had come to question them about it. If that were so, how carelessly Winthrop was falling into the trap.

The doctor took from his pocket slowly a much folded paper.

"Here's something that goes rather close to the bone."

He gave the paper to Winthrop. It was a brief letter written by a hand not accustomed to such exercise. He glanced down and saw that it was unsigned.

"Read it out," said the minister. "Your wife ought to hear it too."

Winthrop began slowly, considering the force of each sentence as he read.

Rev. Sir: I suppose you mean what you say when you get up in that pulpit of yours and tell the world how to be saints. The theory's O. K. Now how about a little practise, Doctor? What's the use of preaching when educated folk can get away with things us ignorant mustn't do? I want to know one thing. Do you think it right for our children to be taught in school by a prostitute? The next time you talk to the school board, ask them whether Elizabeth Briggs hasn't been living with a man for the last two years. She's a friend of

your wife's, and I rather think it's your business to raise the question. If you don't raise it pretty soon, some of us who got tired of religion but still like a little morals will send this question to the whole school board, and we'll tell them that you dodged it.

Winthrop looked at Mary and then at the minister, for a moment quite dazed.

"It seems to be as much of an attack on you, Doctor, as on her. I didn't know you had enemies of this kind."

"Well, that's not the important part, Beauvel. It's one of the agnostic crowd who pick on me because, as the letter says, Mrs. Warren rather likes Elizabeth. But how about the girl? It's just this type of ignorant person who has been waiting to catch her. The question is whether she has done anything indiscreet."

"I'll swear she hasn't!"

Doctor Warren was thoughtful.

"It's the hardest kind of scandal to fight. Every one knows she has stood for liberal ideas, and even though nothing can be proved, many will believe the worst."

Mary leaned toward him.

"Would you be very hard on her, Doctor, if it were true—if, for example, there were some reasonable explanation which made the affair not a vulgar escapade but a tragedy of love?"

At the question the minister withdrew into himself.

"My dear Mrs. Beauvel, I hope I wouldn't be hard on any one who had sinned; we all need forgiveness. But of course her usefulness here would be quite over. Such a person, as the letter says, could hardly be a teacher of children."

Mary flared slightly.

"He calls her a prostitute! She's not that, at any rate."

The minister shook his head sadly.

"I believe she's entirely innocent, until some one proves to me that she's not. But if she has been living with a man, unmarried to him, what you call it makes little difference—at least not so far as the school board would be concerned."

Mary fell back into her chair, breathing heavily, then said nothing. Winthrop was rubbing his hands in a gesture of anguish, his brows fiercely knitted.

"Beauvel, this question can't be dodged, and I rather think our wives can help in what appears to be the first step. My idea is that Elizabeth must know of this letter at once, and it wouldn't be pleasant for a man to show it to her. Your wife or mine ought to do it, or perhaps both together."

Mary was on her guard at once.

"Mrs. Warren would be just the person."

The doctor looked uneasy.

"That was my thought, but she's reluctant to undertake it. I believe the chances are ninety-nine out of a hundred that Elizabeth will say at once the whole thing's a lie, but suppose the other chance is true? Mrs. Warren confesses that the situation would be too difficult for her. She wouldn't know how to deal with that sort of person, and—and, in fact, she'd rather not be mixed up in it. But she'd be willing to see Elizabeth if Mrs. Beauvel would accompany her."

Mary's warmth of manner had returned.

"Then you and Mrs. Warren really fear the letter tells the truth?"

"No, it doesn't, please God! But there's one bad chance, and it's no use shutting eyes to it. She has stood for a pretty liberal philosophy, and if any one were to do this sort of thing—of course I mean from the most modern conception of freedom—she might be the one."

"And you and Mrs. Warren couldn't find it possible under any circumstances to pardon what you call the modern freedom?"

The minister was surprised, and a little hurt.

"I told you, Mrs. Beauvel, it's not my business to judge or to pardon, but these modern notions are—they're quite beyond my comprehension."

She would have argued further, but the look of distress on Winthrop's face stopped her. He, too, was taking the discussion to heart.

"You wish me to see Elizabeth, then, and ask her if the accusation is true?"

"We'd be much in your debt, Mrs. Beauvel, and Mrs. Warren would be glad to go with you."

"No, Doctor. Forgive me for feeling that Elizabeth should be told of this by one who entirely believes in her. I'll see her alone."

VI

WINTHROP came home from business early the next afternoon, and tried to calm his impatience till Mary should return. He had been unable to keep his mind on his work, thinking of Elizabeth, or perhaps of Mary and himself. Strange that the end of their long experiment might arrive unlooked for, through what had happened to this girl. It had not interested him to worry much about her innocence or guilt; selfishly speaking, he found that of slight importance. But Doctor Warren's attitude foreshadowed clearly his own fate, if this community, which had trusted him, should now find him out. And he wasn't entirely selfish in the panic which had seized him. All the good impulses which had turned him to Mary, which had made it pleasant to protect her and to share her companionship, seemed now to have been fiendishly cruel—condemnations to an inescapable and tragic loss of name. Every time he attempted to apply himself at his desk that day, the vision had arisen before him of Mary suddenly unclassed, insulted, snubbed —the subject of whispered nastiness in groups where she had worked devotedly for human welfare. His bitterness against life was great, but not greater than his contempt for himself. In all this experiment he could not recall to his credit one heroic action or decision. He had drawn on nature for his excuse; otherwise he had followed what he saw now had been for him the easiest course.

Mary was unlocking the front door. He sat quiet in the living room to let her go up-stairs, if she should not notice him. At the proper time she would tell what had happened. Though he had left the office early, impatient for news, now that he must look in her eyes he dreaded to see there any of the contempt he felt he deserved. . . . But she knew he was in the house, and came to him directly. He stood up, as though to hear a sentence pronounced.

"You saw her?"

"Yes, I had to wait. Her work kept her at school."

"And what did she say?"

"It's true—she admits it—and without the slightest shame."

"My God!"

"She's an extraordinary person, Winthrop. She's what Isabel thought women ought to be—what I wish I were."

"Eh?"

"She's the first person I've met who sincerely knows her own mind. Whether she's right or wrong, it's an achievement."

"I can't believe it of her!"

"You wouldn't have the slightest difficulty, if you heard her story. It's so simple, I felt ridiculous to be representing the prosecution. Three years ago she met a very fine man and fell in love with him. She insists that he's still very fine. In fact, she says his only fault is that he's over-conventional."

"That's putting it rather strong, I should say."

"No, he wanted to marry her, but she wasn't sure they'd get on after the romance was gone. She asked

him to try it out first, for a while, in secret. She says she had to use every argument she could think of to persuade him. He was as sure as Doctor Warren is, that such an experiment is sin."

"Then she's a fool! Why didn't she marry him?"

"Because of the little fear she couldn't get rid of, that it might not last, and since she was quite right, she's glad now they weren't married permanently."

"He got tired of her, eh?"

"On the contrary, she says she had to send him away, and he's still grieving over the wrong he thinks he did her. But she says she knew she never could be happy in the same house with his conscience. He was always measuring life by what other people might think of it —that is, by what the church might think, or society, or people who lived a thousand years ago, or who might live in some future age. She calls him a compendium of good opinions. At the end of a year she knew she was not the right woman. Somewhere in the world there must be one with whom he could have a natural, untroubled emotion. Then he begged her to give him another trial, and they continued the experiment for a second year. Because they were no happier then, she sent him away."

Winthrop dropped into his easy chair.

"I'd have given almost anything not to have it happen, Mary."

"Which? Her experiment, or its being found out?"

He did not answer. She surveyed him as though he, not Elizabeth, were the person on trial.

"Do you know what she said to me, Winthrop? While

she was explaining her point of view, making it clear why she considered herself justified, she said, 'I think it as much a sin as Doctor Warren does to lead an immoral life, but Mrs. Beauvel, much wiser people than you and I, perhaps even than Doctor Warren, have been pointing out for a long time that morality does not necessarily coincide with matrimony. It ought to. I wouldn't marry a man I couldn't promise to love as long as we lived. But I'd rather make my mistake before I got married than take a vow I couldn't possibly keep. That's the whole difference between my philosophy and yours.' She thinks I stand for the proprieties, Winthrop! And then she said, 'Can't you imagine how good a man he was, and give me credit for being a good girl, even when we were trying to find out, through suffering as well as happiness, whether we belonged to each other? If you were to tell me now, Mrs. Beauvel, that you and your husband were not legally married, I'd still know you were two of the most moral people I had ever met, because you love each other and are faithful, and lead a life which spreads goodness around you.' That's what she said to me, Winthrop."

Her voice trembled as she finished, and she turned away from him, apparently to take off her hat and smooth her hair in the mirror, but he knew she was keeping back tears. He went over to her and put his arms around her shoulder. She looked up, trying to smile.

"I guess we're in the same boat," she said.

"You and I are."

"I mean, she is too. She doesn't deserve to be found out. Not if we aren't, Winthrop."

He walked to the table and lighted a cigarette, then paced up and down the room. At last he stopped and put his hand again on her shoulder.

"You were a little afraid I wouldn't stand by her, weren't you?"

"I knew you'd do nothing unkind if you understood."

"Well, I'll call up Warren now and tell him there's nothing in the case."

"But you can't say that; she acknowledges the truth of it. In fact, Winthrop, she's eager to explain to the whole board. Naturally she would have preferred tc keep her misfortunes to herself, but she says she can't afford now to have the story get around in a garbled form."

"Does she actually expect to tell them that story and then stay here?"

"No, she expects to resign."

"I call that crazy, Mary. She's making her decision too hastily. Tell her to think it over. It's one thing to talk freely to you, and quite another to persuade that hard-boiled lot on the board. Those men are all right, but they're not modern enough to get this. Most of them, I happen to know, have had their casual escapades when they were younger. And some step across the line occasionally, even now. I shouldn't like Elizabeth to put herself into the only category that crowd are acquainted with."

Mary's eyes blazed.

"I wish each one of them could be a woman for five minutes, and listen to a man talk like that! Your sex, on the whole, Winthrop, have made no progress in morality for the last million years. You want to protect Elizabeth

from the soiled minds of your friends, who at the moment are trying to protect the younger generation from her. What a mess! Have you thought of a good argument to lay before them the day they investigate me?"

"Don't say that, for God's sake, Mary!"

"We've avoided the subject successfully for nearly ten years, haven't we, Winthrop? I'm thinking now that honorable as we thought our conduct, and as we still have a right to think it, between ourselves, it never had the excuse of an idealism so high nor so pure as this girl's, and the experience has left her unharmed."

"You mean it has harmed us?"

Before she could answer, the telephone rang. Winthrop went out into the hall. She could hear him exclaim over the news from the other end. She turned the pages of her book mechanically until he came back, framing meanwhile a reply, not too blunt, to the question he had left with her.

"That was Doctor Warren," he said. "It's past saving now. The anonymous letter reached the whole school board in the afternoon mail. Every man Jack of them as he gets home is calling up the doctor."

Mary was less disturbed than he thought she should be.

"Whoever wrote the letter must have expected quick action from the doctor," she said.

"You don't realize the girl is ruined now."

"Is she, Winthrop? Perhaps if any of us understood ourselves or our fellows, we'd be less sure of what is disaster and what is salvation."

She put her hands up to his face in a rare gesture of caress.

"Dear companion in adversity!" she said. "Shall you and I behave well now?"

Elizabeth appeared before the board immediately, only two days after the defamatory letters were received. Her eagerness to meet them told against her in advance. Most of the men were convinced that she was brazen. She asked the superintendent to present her resignation at the earliest moment, but on condition that she could speak to the board for ten minutes, immediately after it had been accepted. She didn't want any one to think, she said, that she was pleading to retain her post. She resigned because most people would feel her usefulness in that place was ended, and if they felt so, there was nothing to debate. Her children, she said, could not study happily under her unless they knew she had faith in them, nor could she do her best work for a school board which had any doubt of her, warranted or unwarranted. On the other hand, she had too much respect for herself and for her neighbors not to wish the facts of her life reported correctly—those facts, at least, upon which their judgment rested.

When Mr. Miller conveyed her wishes, several members urged that she be dismissed without further discussion. Winthrop led the faction which insisted that her resignation be accepted on her own terms, and that she be allowed to state her case. He even persuaded his colleagues to postpone their official vote until they had heard her. His firmness owed something to Mary's support, and something also to his knowledge that the most ruthless of his colleagues were less cruel than they sounded —were, in fact, moved by a certain embarrassment, an unwillingness to meet face to face the girl whose courage and independence they felt obliged to condemn. In the

forty-eight hours before they gathered in the high school, Mary had spread assiduously the account of her talk with Elizabeth, and the women had passed it on, with inevitable modifications, to their husbands. The essential facts were known, and though there could be no doubt of the outcome, there was already a slight resentment against the coward who had told on the girl without signing a name, and who had attempted an injury to Doctor Warren, as a by-product of the scandal. Already the public sentiment was in favor of hushing the matter up, in Elizabeth's own interest as well as that of the school, but since the girl would not go in silence, they heard her.

When she came into the room, escorted by the superintendent, the board instinctively rose, some of them with an unnatural awkwardness, as though doubtful of the proper etiquette toward a criminal. The chairman offered her his hand.

"Sit down, Miss Briggs," he said.

The board resumed their seats.

"I shan't take but a minute," she began, "and if you don't mind, I'll stand. Thank you for listening to me at all. I have nothing to ask of you, only to say that I have been happy in my work here, and am sorry to leave it. Please don't think I want to offer excuses for myself. I believe that what I did was the only right thing for me, but I understand how you and most other people will think it altogether wrong. I suppose any one of us likes to be seen from the point of view that he thinks is the correct one, the one from which he sees himself. If you'll let me tell you how I see myself, I shall always be grateful."

She repeated the story she had given to Mary, but in a

condensed form. She and her lover had seriously tried to find out whether they were suited to each other. Since they were not, they had parted.

"Trial marriage," whispered one of the board to his neighbor.

"I suppose that's what it was, though we didn't fasten a name on it. We might have married, of course, found out we were mistaken, and divorced each other. If we had done that, you wouldn't have been disturbed, would you? Two of you gentlemen on this board, among the most honored of my friends, have been divorced."

She looked straight at Beauvel. He couldn't remember who was the other man.

"I don't mean to set my opinion up against that of people who know more, but I just couldn't have a divorce myself. That's where I suppose I am too old-fashioned."

She paused, as though expecting them to ask her a question. When no one spoke, she bowed to Mr. Miller.

"That's all I wanted to say. Thank you and good-by."

One of the board detained her.

"Would you mind telling us, Miss Briggs, whether this course of yours was influenced or determined in any way by your reading?"

"I'm sure it was. I've read all I could find that's been written recently about marriage and the home."

"Some time ago you were criticized, you remember, for asking the children to study certain modern books. I'm wondering if you like the idea that perhaps some of them will be repeating your experiment, or trying something similar?"

She thought a moment.

"I hope that somebody at some time will discover what is the right experiment. I hope it will work out much happier than mine has."

"You'll admit then that what you have done has brought you unhappiness?"

"Of course. We didn't love each other after all, so we had to part, and that isn't happy. But think how much worse off we might be now if I had done what he asked and had married him."

"Then you don't regret what you did?"

"The one thing I'm sorry for is that our attempt to make a good arrangement for the most personal interest in our life has ended in a public embarrassment for my friends, but I suppose that can't be helped."

No one else asked her a question, and she left the room. The chairman stirred uneasily in his chair.

"Are you ready to act on Miss Briggs' resignation?"

Winthrop rose to his feet.

"I move it be laid on the table. The situation is awkward for all of us, and whether we dismiss her or whether we don't, we'll have to stand criticism. I'm willing to go on record as publicly as you like that I think she's a good woman and a good teacher, and if I had children I'd be proud to have them study under her. What she said about the difference there would have been in our attitude had she married him and been divorced, went home with me. On the basis of the facts we know, I can't vote to dismiss her."

His colleagues said nothing, but he knew from their silence that they would not take his view. He added a concluding plea.

"If any of you men feel the necessity of standing by the conventions in order to preserve law and order, I agree with you. But I was thinking while we listened to her that we are in danger of being hypocritical, and perhaps it's this tendency we older people have, to be hypocritical in good causes, which puts us out of touch with the young. If all marriages were as happy as they are legal, we'd have nothing to discuss and she'd have no excuse. But if she were my daughter and were telling me as frankly as she told us in public what she has done, I shouldn't be in the slightest degree ashamed of her. Why should I feel differently about it, just because our relation happens to be a more formal one?"

There was a pause. The man who had questioned Elizabeth, spoke.

"Beauvel, some of us are still old-fashioned enough to dislike divorce almost as much as the informal experiment this girl made. You'll forgive me if I seem personal. If the subject is hard to discuss, it's because some of our neighbors always seem to be involved in our most abstract remarks. You think her conduct is just as admirable as though she had been married and divorced. I agree, but I think divorce is an abomination. Naturally you believe otherwise, or you wouldn't have had a divorce yourself. And your view may be correct, but if society is to work together, we must allow for all the views and not fly in the face of the majority. The majority of parents still don't want their children brought up by a fascinating young woman who has dispensed with the marriage ceremony. That's all there is to it. You and I are elected to do what the majority of the parents want.

If we fail to render that service they'll elect some one else who will. . . . Let me ask you this question: If this girl weren't already on the staff, if she were applying for the position now, and in the record submitted to us this experiment of hers were set down frankly, would you consider it a recommendation or the opposite?"

"I don't see it that way at all. When she came into the service here, this thing hadn't yet happened. She never tried to deceive us."

"Oh, that's all right, but it's aside from the point."

Winthrop gave up the cause. He had tried to satisfy his conscience, but from the first he had known, as Elizabeth had, that Harrington was finished with her. When the board voted, he asked to have his dissent put down in the minutes.

After the meeting the men spoke more freely about the case, apologizing, as it seemed to him, for what they had done, or at least trying to set the matter easy in their own minds. The man who had spoken out against her, came across the room, obviously cordial and propitiatory.

"I can quite understand your position, Beauvel, even though I had to take the other side. Your wife's very fond of this girl, isn't she? She's been doing some pretty active work on her behalf."

"We both believe in her."

The man nodded and walked away again.

He sought Mary in her room before they went down to dinner, and he closed the door carefully so that Maggie and Martha might not hear. His report was, of course, what she had expected.

"I wish I knew what the poor girl's future would be," she said.

"I want to talk to you about ours. We can't go on this way."

She thought he was going to suggest that they part.

"I always told you, Winthrop, I was ready to do what you wish."

"Then we'll get married," he said. "We'll take a trip to Europe, or some other part of the world, and find a quiet corner the newspapers don't know about, and a justice of the peace who doesn't recognize us."

"But you are still Isabel's husband."

"There'll have to be a divorce, of course, and that's awkward, but I've been facing the issue pretty honestly to-day. No doubt we'll have to leave this town. I suggest that we go at once before the news gets out, so that we can say good-by pleasantly, no matter what they think of us afterward."

"But will Isabel give you a divorce now?"

He looked at her as though to make sure she would understand what he was about to say.

"I've been keeping a secret from you. Only a little while after we came here, Isabel wrote asking for a divorce. She had met some one she wished to marry. Divorce proceedings just at that moment would have ruined us here, and I told her I thought the request was unfair—it was her duty to give us a chance."

"What did she say?"

"Not a word from that day to this, not until six weeks or so ago. Then she sent me another letter quite threatening, demanding the divorce. This time she didn't mention the man, but I suppose he's been waiting for

her all these years. If I wouldn't advise her as to procedure, she said she'd look up a French lawyer at once. Well, I hadn't the courage to face the music, and decided to leave it to fate; if she wanted to start the row, she could. I didn't reply to her, and I've heard nothing. You can imagine the sort of shadow I've lived under these days, thinking of Elizabeth and knowing that at any moment Isabel could put you and me in a position still less defensible. This afternoon I saw for the first time that I've been a coward, that more and more I've risked your happiness in order to protect myself. I'll not continue in that dastardly attitude. If you still think well enough of me to stay, we'll take the aggressive move ourselves. We'll go away from Harrington, clean up the divorce, be legally married and start over again. What do you say?"

She looked away from him and at first did not reply. He had offered her nothing very cheerful, but he was surprised that she did not grasp at his solution with her characteristic zest for the downright honest.

"If you don't care for me, Mary, or if we've lived together long enough, of course that's different."

"I was wondering if you cared for me."

"Why, it's for your sake entirely that I'm proposing it."

She turned around, then, and looked at him.

"I know that, Winthrop. It's to avoid such a public disaster as has befallen Elizabeth. You're acting like a good friend and a generous man, but Winthrop, that isn't love. We told Isabel we didn't love each other. Have your feelings changed so much that you now would make a different statement? We're fond of each other,

we're each part of the other's habits, but that is like matrimony after the bloom is gone. Have we ever struck such deep roots of companionship as would take the place of the early passion young lovers have? If we're to start fresh, as you say, let's really look at it as a beginning. If we were meeting now for the first time, and you felt toward me no otherwise than you now do, would you ask me to be your wife? And would I, feeling as I feel, say yes?"

She thought he blanched a little as she spoke, but he answered firmly.

"All right, then, let's look at it that way. Mary, will you marry me?"

"No, Winthrop dear—never."

In the brief silence that followed it seemed to them both that fate punctuated their decision with a ring at the door-bell. Neither stirred. They heard Maggie cross the hall down-stairs, confer briefly with the caller, then start up toward the room where they were.

"Some one to see you, Winthrop."

Maggie knocked at the door.

"Come in, Maggie."

The woman entered and drew the door to behind her.

"Mr. Beauvel, there's a lady down-stairs wants particularly to see you. I asked her what about, but she wouldn't say. I asked if it was something to do with the school trouble, and she said, 'Far from it.' "

Winthrop interrupted sharply.

"What's her name?"

"She wouldn't give me the whole of it, that's why I thought you might want me to keep her out. She said just to tell you that Isabel had come back."

Part Five

THE CASE, FROM THE INSIDE

THE CASE, FROM THE INSIDE

I

It was Mary who recovered herself first.

"That's all right, Maggie. Ask her to come up here."

The girl turned away surprised. When she was gone, Winthrop spoke:

"Why did you say that?"

"You don't want to talk with her down-stairs, do you, where the servants would hear?"

She took his hand and squeezed it.

"Now you must show yourself as fine as you are."

He was still wondering what she intended to do, when Isabel stood in the doorway.

"I'm sorry to intrude, Winthrop, but I thought you wouldn't mind my coming here for a moment. How do you do, Mary."

She held out her hand, though the tone of her voice was not particularly friendly. Perhaps in the circumstances it was not easy to assume a natural tone. Mary rose and went toward her.

"You're looking well, Isabel. Where on earth have you come from?"

"I'm just back from Europe."

She glanced around for a chair.

"May I sit down?"

"Do. Let me take your coat."

"No, thanks. I shan't be but a moment."

Mary went back to her own chair and waited for Isabel to explain her errand. Winthrop remained standing, with his astonished gaze fixed on his returned wife. For the moment, at least, Isabel was in control of the awkward scene. She gave the room a leisurely inspection, then looked up at her husband and smiled.

"I suppose you are surprised to see me."

"Very much so."

She looked at Mary with the same inscrutable smile.

"You are Mrs. Beauvel now, I understand."

Mary flushed and said nothing.

"When I arrived here this afternoon, Winthrop, I went at once to the hotel near the station, and I learned something of your history."

"What was that?"

"I registered there as Isabel Beauvel, and the clerk asked me if I was related to you. I hope it won't embarrass you, but I told him I was. 'Ah, you are the writer,' he said, 'his first wife.' Since I really am your first wife, I told him he was correct."

She paused, apparently to enjoy their embarrassment. Winthrop decided to end the interview.

"Why have you come back? What do you want with me?"

Neither the question nor the tone in which it was asked disturbed her.

"I'm not sure why I came back, nor am I clear as to what I want. I merely thought that we three might meet again once more as friends and have a talk."

"About what? The divorce?"

"I no longer wish the divorce, Winthrop. If I did I would take steps to get it, since you won't help. But that's over, and you needn't look scared. Furthermore,

I didn't come back to interfere with you. If you and Mary are happy, you may continue as you are, for all of me. But after ten years I found myself homesick, and perhaps I was curious to see with my own eyes the sort of arrangement you have made. I always knew you loved each other. You evidently have learned how to have your own way and keep the secret. I must say I admire you."

Winthrop did not believe her errand was so empty and innocent as she pretended. But if her ease of manner was assumed, then she was a better actress than he had supposed. He suspected something at once more genuine and more malicious.

"Isabel, you know as well as I that what you are saying is not pleasant for Mary to hear, nor for me. What's the use of raking up the old trouble? When you left us we were not lovers, and though a series of accidents forced us, or made us drift, into our present way of life, we are still not lovers in the sense that you mean; we are merely cordial friends who through suffering have grown close to each other. We have lived, during these ten years, shadowed by the possibility that at any moment some one might discover our true relation, and we knew, of course, that nobody in the world could understand it, unless it was you. Do you still wish to be frank? When you left, you were angry. I won't conceal the fact that I sometimes feared you were biding your time, to ruin us. When you asked for the divorce, long ago and again recently, I thought you were preparing to clear up the situation at our expense."

He waited, as though he had asked a question, but she indicated no willingness to relieve his mind. Mary was the first to speak.

"Don't think from what Winthrop has said that either

he or I could be scared, as you call it. It's one thing to be held in a state of suspense, and another to be frightened. If you break up our life here in Harrington, you may prove to be an angel in disguise. In the end you may be doing us a great favor."

Winthrop turned to her, startled. She went on without looking at him.

"You've come back at the end of a chapter. If you have any favor to ask, or any demands to make, now is the moment."

Isabel showed unfeigned interest.

"What do you mean by the end of a chapter?"

Mary replied with one of Isabel's own masklike smiles.

"You haven't told us much about your life abroad, in fact, nothing as yet. It's not necessary to bore you with our quiet record."

"Oh, it's quiet, is it?"

"Very—on the whole."

"At the hotel I picked up some gossip about a schoolteacher that Winthrop is interested in."

The other two caught the insinuation. Mary laughed.

"I am more interested in her than he is. Yes, we have our local scandals to relieve monotony, but in general, life here is of that smooth respectability which you found unendurable. I hope Europe has justified itself as an escape?"

Once more Winthrop grew impatient.

"Isabel, you made a mistake to come here this evening. If you want anything from me, the way to get it is not by trying to tease Mary."

Isabel assumed the manner of offended virtue.

"I'll go now if you wish, Winthrop, but I didn't come here to be disagreeable. I wanted merely to see you both for a moment."

In spite of her offer to go, she did not stir from the chair. Winthrop continued in a more courteous tone.

"You know, Mary and I would have been glad enough to part as friends, when you insisted on leaving, but you couldn't see it that way then—you wouldn't stay, you left us to look after each other. Unless you tell us what your attitude is now, or why you've come back, how can you expect me not to be on my guard against you?"

She looked him straight in the eye.

"I've been absent for ten years. I should think you might be glad to see me again for a few moments—your own wife, at least that's what I once was."

Maggie knocked at the door.

"Dinner is served, Mrs. Beauvel."

Isabel stood up.

"Oh, I've detained you—I'll stop in again some time, if you'll let me, at a more convenient hour."

Winthrop and Mary exchanged glances. His thought was that they had better complete the visit now and avoid a repetition. She felt ill at ease to turn Isabel away as they were sitting down to their meal.

"Can't you dine with us?" she said. "Maggie will set another place."

Isabel looked at Winthrop.

"Of course I'm intruding terribly."

With Maggie listening, Winthrop couldn't express his true feelings.

"Oh, not at all—stay and tell us what you've been doing in Europe."

His own hypocrisy nearly choked him. As they went down to the dining-room, he wondered if these voices he heard were his and Mary's, exchanging polite nothings with the unwanted guest. But at the table Isabel behaved surprisingly well. She had gathered enough hints about his career in Harrington to ask intelligent and not compromising questions. At first he thought she wished to pry into his history, but before the meal was over he had to admit she had put on all the outer appearances of cordial friendship. If Maggie knew she was his first wife, the girl must be thinking that the three people dining together had reached a high plane of modern liberality. When he asked Isabel about her own experiences, she replied without the slightest reluctance. He knew now where she had been staying, and she described rather cleverly some of the more public scenes of her adventures. She even spoke of Carl, of course without reporting the Nice incident, or the proposal on the boat, but portraying vividly his worldly wisdom and his sympathy with the arts. Mary had left the conversation to the other two until Carl was mentioned.

"I knew you must have met some interesting European men," she said. "It shows in your stories. Really, they are quite remarkable, Isabel. Each seems to me a little keener than the last. You feel it yourself, don't you?"

Isabel was pleased.

"I can't say I do. While I was writing them I thought they were fairly good, but one outgrows one's own works so fast. They bore me now."

"The readers over here aren't tired of them. You have an astonishing understanding of men."

Isabel would have preferred a different compliment.

"I thought the women were rather well done."

"Oh, no—the men. That interesting, aggressive type."

Isabel looked at her.

"If I'd known you were reading the stories, I'd have expected you to call them cynical, and to have hated the men."

"They are cynical, and the men are hateful, but very interesting. They must have fascinated you, Isabel, or you wouldn't have described them so often."

Winthrop listened to the two women with his thoughts on Mary. As she spoke to Isabel, he caught a glimpse of her inner life. He had known she was following Isabel's stories, but now for the first time he guessed why. It wasn't after all mere curiosity to see what Isabel was doing, it was a genuine interest in the world she wrote about, and envy, perhaps, of her acquaintance with a type of man not found in Harrington. This fellow Carl, of whom Isabel spoke—perhaps that was the sort of person Mary could have loved with all her heart. He felt a bitter thrust of jealousy. This woman he had stood by and protected, but whose complete affection he had not won, would perhaps have given herself utterly to one of those foreign bounders. That's about what you could expect of women. Do loyalty, steadiness and the other virtues count with them? They do not!

He failed to qualify these pessimistic thoughts with the reflection that Mary might have loved him if he had loved her. He overlooked the fact that she had given him all that he had up to that moment asked for. As the two women talked, he was thinking only that it was now

his turn to get something out of life, and the idea came to him—he recognized it as a cynical idea, worthy of place in one of Isabel's stories—that if the positions had been reversed, if Mary had been his wife and Isabel the friend who had lunched with him in Boston, his fate might have been exactly the same. Either woman could have played either rôle. He did not pursue the thought, nor was he entirely convinced that it was correct, but the fact that he had the idea at all, encouraged him to believe he was at last beginning to see through life.

Isabel was talking now.

"And how about your own stories, Mary? I've been out of touch so long, and it's so hard to get American books and American magazines abroad, I don't know what you've been writing."

"I haven't written a line."

"You don't mean nothing in ten years?"

"Nothing. I'm not a novelist, Isabel. If I were, I should have written."

Isabel was actually growing sympathetic. Winthrop caught the look in her eyes and the softer tone in her voice.

"It's not your fault. If I had stayed in Fairfax, I couldn't have written another line, either."

He wondered whether Mary would contradict this sweeping verdict on her world and his, but she said nothing. He resented the fact that the two were getting on so well.

When the meal was over they had their coffee in the living room, and Isabel asked politely enough about their neighbors, about Mary's work for the library, about his business, about the interest in physical education

which he had recently acquired and was now stimulating in others. The old habit of her presence was stealing back on him again. He kept wondering when in heaven's name the woman would leave, yet it seemed natural for her to be there, and just because he did not know the reason for her coming, it was hard to foresee the moment of her departure. Superficially, at least, she was enjoying herself. He watched Mary for a hint as to what he ought to do, but she had relaxed into a subdued silence, answering Isabel's questions but preferring to listen. He wondered if it was this old attitude of discipleship revived in Mary, which was making Isabel cheerful and confident.

He knew that the servants had gone to bed and the hour must be very late, but from where he sat he couldn't see the clock, and he lacked enough audacity to take out his watch. He could have sworn that Isabel too was conscious of the hour, talking with more and more energy in order to prolong the visit. At last in a pause between remarks, they heard the town clock, and all three silently counted strokes. Isabel pretended surprise.

"Oh, how late it is—twelve! I had no idea!"

There was an awkward pause. Perhaps they each remembered another midnight meeting at the foot of the staircase in Fairfax. Winthrop felt dimly that his hand was being forced now, as it had been then. His manner was anything but cordial.

"I'll walk back with you to the hotel."

"Oh, really, it's not necessary. I can find my way."

"How did you come out?"

"In a taxi, but I think I'll remember the streets."

"Oh, no, you'll surely get lost. I'll take you back."

Isabel made no further refusal of his escort, and he went for his hat. When he came back to the living room, Mary was offering her the guest room.

"Really, it's more sensible to stay," she said, "than to go back to the hotel at this hour."

The other woman's scruples were of course insurmountable.

"Mary, my dear—in the circumstances how could I remain?"

Mary replied with a little flash of indignation.

"You would go back to the hotel with Winthrop, when they know there that you are his first wife? What wouldn't this town be saying before morning?"

Isabel looked at her shrewdly.

"I'm afraid they will say worse things if I stay here for the night."

To Winthrop it seemed they were starting the old debate over again, and never did it sound so hollow as at that hour.

"Isabel," he said, "whether you intend it or not, your return is sure to start talk. You haven't told me what your plans are, why you came back, nor how long you intend to stay. But though you've left us no opportunity to consider our own convenience, at least consider your own. If you wish to go to the hotel now, I'll show you the way and we'll face whatever scandal follows, or if you prefer Mary's invitation, stay here, and let the gossips do their best with that possibility. I'm not so polite as I'd like to seem, but the hour is late, and I have some engagements in the morning."

Apparently his plain talk was not distasteful.

"I'll save you the inconvenience of going out to-night.

I'll stay, Mary, since you were kind enough to ask me."

Mary took her to the guest room, and Winthrop retired to his side of the house. It was almost morning before he could sleep, what with the evening's talk and the haunting question of Isabel's intentions. He was annoyed at something more than her sudden return, at the whole situation—the ugly session of the school board, the self-examination which the fate of Elizabeth had forced upon him, the grotesque fact that he was at that moment under the same roof with these two women, and they sleeping soundly in adjoining rooms across the hall. Ignominious!

But he was mistaken in the thought that either of them was less wakeful than he. At breakfast three weary and nervous people met. The awkwardness of their manners was painful. He wanted to ask Isabel to leave the house before he did, but no useful formula for this idea suggested itself. Of course it wouldn't do to escort her back to the hotel by daylight, still less to leave her behind, to torture Mary.

He waited for her to move.

"I dare say I'm keeping you," she said at last. "You wish to get down-town to those engagements. Thanks for your hospitality. I can carry away now a clear picture of your life together."

He and Mary both had the same thought. She said it first.

"Where are you going, Isabel?"

"I haven't the slightest notion. I half hoped that the sight of you might suggest my future."

They offered no helpful advice, and she started upstairs for her hat and coat. Just at the foot of the stair-

case she turned back, and in a sudden burst of irritation pronounced judgment on them both.

"I'm glad to see what your life is like. It's as I expected. You thought you could be free, you wanted adventure, Mary, and Winthrop was bored by a narrow domesticity. Well, it looks to me that you've dug yourselves into a narrowness twenty times worse than the one you revolted against."

Winthrop would have reminded her that it was she who had done the revolting, but before he could speak, Mary replied in a tone so resolute that he turned upon her, amazed.

"Thank you, Isabel, for telling us the truth! We've reached sincerity at last, and you are the natural one to bring it back to us. We *are* narrow. We both are tired of each other, and of the long attempt to seem what we are not. We've almost admitted it, but your just word makes it clear. You need not go away now, not unless you wish. It's my turn—I'm going. I shall leave this house as soon as I can pack up. If you want your man again, and if he wants you, there he is!"

Winthrop stared at her, dazed.

"As soon as you can pack up?" he repeated.

She put her hand on his shoulder.

"It's the right thing, isn't it? Thank you for the steady friendship, the companionship and all that, but we know as well as Isabel there was nothing to keep us here, nothing but her absence. How well it works out! I'll leave to-day with Elizabeth Briggs."

It was she, not Isabel, who went up-stairs. He wanted to call her back, yet after all, even if Isabel had not been there, he could not ask her to stay, he had nothing to

offer. If she must go, she must. Isabel watched him.

"Is this true, Winthrop? Do you and she feel as she says? Neither of you ought to think I returned in order to break up your partnership."

He hated to answer, but she kept her eye on him and he could not persist in his silence.

"It was our agreement that when she wished to leave me, she could. I know no more about it than you. Apparently, she wishes to go now."

"In that case," said Isabel, "I'll stay."

If Maggie had not appeared at that moment at the dining-room door, he would have ordered Isabel out of the house, but he had to smother his wrath, and watch her go up-stairs to assist Mary in the packing.

II

At the office that morning he could put his mind on none of the business that awaited him. On his desk was a pile of letters, but when he read a new order for the colonial furniture, or an inquiry into prices and possible deliveries, his nerves shrieked against the silliness of such things, compared with the drama in which he was at the moment suffering, chief actor or chief victim. He had thought it dignified to leave the house without further words with the women. What they said to each other when Isabel went up-stairs, he could only guess; what train Mary intended to take, where she was going, he did not know. But of one thing he was sure: before the furniture ordered that morning should be delivered, he would leave this office, some other place than Harrington would be the scene of his harassed existence. He lacked interest now in details, the results of which he did not expect to see.

His associates in the office ascribed his absent-mindedness to the school board meeting of the afternoon before, rumors of which had spread themselves through the town overnight. The younger generation felt that Winthrop had taken a humane view of Elizabeth's case, and most of his office staff were surrounding him with silent sympathy. A few of them, of course, couldn't take his point of view. One stenographer, especially, eyed him with distinct disapproval. He wondered if she was acquainted with the hotel clerk. He was sorry he had to

spend the day in the same room with her austere face. . . . Just before noon he closed his desk and walked home. It was not his custom to return for lunch, but he could bear the suspense no longer—he must know what Mary was doing.

She was in her room.

"Where is Isabel?" he asked.

"I think she has gone to the hotel for her baggage. She intends to stay here."

"But she can't—I haven't asked her to!"

A little of Mary's old humor came back.

"I'm sorry for you, Winthrop, but it's no longer my problem."

"I don't see that. We've shared each other's fate too long for you to sell me out this way."

"Sell you out? That's not a nice phrase."

"You've made some sort of truce with her. You've planned something together. You'll abandon me and let her come in, as though I had nothing to say about it."

Mary stood up—what they were both thinking was too momentous for a less formal posture.

"Winthrop, she ought not to have left you, but now she is here again, and she's still your wife. Whatever your embarrassment is, think of mine. Could I do anything but go?"

"Then you didn't mean what you said, about wishing to escape from a narrow life?"

"Yes, I meant it."

"Oh, you did! You want to explore the world as she's been doing, with no responsibilities. Is that it?"

"Perhaps it is."

He turned away disgusted.

"Well, I suppose there's nothing I can say, then."

"Winthrop, nothing—unless you can tell me one thing with complete truthfulness. If you were to swear now, after our years together, that with all your heart and soul you love me, that you could imagine no life without my companionship, that you yourself never yearned for a freer existence than ours in this house, then it would be hard for me to go. But you can't honestly say that, can you?"

As a matter of fact, he could not.

"You see, it's the right moment to part. Your problem and mine is finished. So far as I am concerned, you and she are where you were ten years ago. It was a mistake then to interfere in your affairs. From now on I shall be more wise."

That was the last word he could get from her. When it was almost time for the train he called a taxi and they drove to the station. Elizabeth was to visit an aunt in Albany, and Mary thought she might stay in that city a few days until she decided what to do permanently. It relieved the awkwardness somewhat to meet Elizabeth in the waiting room and to accept her interpretation of Mary's journey, that it was undertaken out of sympathy for her. The three stood waiting for the train, talking of inconsequential subjects. At the last minute he drew Mary to one side.

"Have you enough money?"

"Plenty, thanks."

"Where shall I send your next month's allowance?"

"But that's over, Winthrop. I can't take any more from you."

"Do you think I can let you go without a cent?"

She tried to be very casual.

"I've an income of my own, you know."

"Good heavens, Mary, I know how small that is. By the way, did you arrange with the bank to have those dividends sent on to you? And do you want your account transferred?"

She was suddenly confused.

"I forgot all about that! Will you attend to it for me?—The Ten Eyck Hotel."

As the train carried her and Elizabeth away, they waved through the window at him. It was hard to believe she was not off for a brief and pleasant visit, that she was leaving him now for ever. . . . He turned back toward his house, avoiding the main streets and walking with his eyes down. His thoughts were even less of what he must say to Isabel than of the steps he must now take to provide for Mary, and to dispose of his business and of what had been his home. At that moment it would have disturbed him little to know that his life must end at the next street-crossing. These hectic hours had drained his courage.

Isabel was waiting for him in the living room, actually sitting there with her hat off, pretending to read a book, as though the house belonged to her. He had no doubt at all that her baggage was already up-stairs, unpacked. As he stood in the doorway, in the face of this apparition, he was aware of Maggie sticking her head out furtively from the butler's pantry, to see how he would dispose of the intruder. Isabel did not help him, she merely put down the book and waited for the storm to break.

"In plain terms, Isabel, let me ask you what you are doing here."

She assumed again that exasperating smile, but distracted though he was, he knew as soon as she began to speak that she too was nerve-racked, holding herself together under the strain.

"It's simple enough," she said. "Mary's gone, and you are alone. I know you don't want me, but I ask a favor of you—let me stay."

"On what basis, for heaven's sake? We haven't an idea nor an impulse in common. I doubt if there is a single kindly feeling in your heart for me, nothing but a cherished desire for revenge. That's all right, but if I must suffer, I won't pretend to enjoy it. Finish up the ruin you've started, but do me the great courtesy to get out!"

He hadn't wished to be quite so rude. She winced.

"Do you mean that? Have I done you so much harm that you must be less gentle than you'd show yourself to a stranger?"

"I don't get the comparison."

"If a tramp came to your door and asked for shelter, you wouldn't tell him to get out."

"Perhaps I would if he invited himself to set up housekeeping with me. Haven't I the right to my own home?"

He thought he saw tears in her eyes, and cursed her for the crocodile trick.

"Have I no rights in your home, Winthrop?"

"No, by God!"

"For all that, even though I have no rights, I hope you'll let me stay a while."

It occurred to him that perhaps he was missing a good opportunity.

"Do you mean that you like the house? The location, and all that?"

"I do."

"Well, see here, you can have it—I'll give it to you. Stay as long as you like."

"Winthrop!"

Her cry of surprise and pleasure died quickly as she watched his face.

"You mean you will take me back?"

"I mean I am leaving too. You had your try at liberty, now Mary will take hers. Why should I be the only one to stay home? I can't pack up so quickly as you women—there's the business to dispose of, and one or two other matters to arrange—but I'll be out of here in a week, if I have luck. The house is yours."

He would have left her then, but he had hardly turned his face away before she was at his side, reaching for his hands, trying to draw him to her.

"You don't understand at all! You don't know me, Winthrop. You never did understand. You think I came back to torture you, but it was because I couldn't bear my own torment away from you. Can't you see I love you?"

"No," he said, "I can't see it at all. You took the first chance you could get to leave me, and you seem to have had small concern for my welfare during a good section of a lifetime. If what you feel is love, then I don't know what the word means."

She would not let him go. She was clinging to him, pleading with her body, with her lips and hands.

"Let me stay, Winthrop, let me stay! I did not know what I had, but since the hour I left you I found

no happiness. More than enough excitement, but no happiness. What drew me home again was the remembrance of our house, its order and its peace, and your kindness. When I said that you and Mary were lost in a still narrower world, if I had been truthful I should have added that I wanted that very narrowness once more, for myself."

"This isn't the way you talked when you left me," he said. "I've an old copy of *The Atlantic* still, with an essay on the disadvantages of a happy home."

"Don't! I never really meant it."

"You did. You're not sincere now."

"Then I don't wish to be sincere—I want you!"

He unclasped her arms gently from around his neck and persuaded her to be seated on the divan near the door. She held him, tried to draw him down beside her, but he disengaged himself and stood away.

"If that's the truth now," he said, "I'm sorry—I'm downright sorry. But if you knew what I've been living through, you wouldn't go back on your old essay so quickly. You were right, essentially. We all ought to be sincere. I never felt bitter about your leaving, though I was sorry you went, but I do think there's something mean in your changing your mind, and expecting the world to readjust itself once more. You ought to have more courage."

"I have none now!"

"Then I'm sorry again."

He paused for her to speak.

"I'm sorry for myself, but it's the truth. I've no courage left. I'm at your mercy."

He tried to think out the next step.

"See here, Isabel, no matter how discouraged you feel at the moment, you have a pretty sound brain. Do you really think it's an appropriate moment to break in here and ask me to love you?"

"I didn't—I never shall. I said it was I who loved you. I asked you merely to let me stay."

"Not as my wife?"

"As anything you like."

Perhaps she thought he was weakening, since he had begun to define the possible relationship. She looked more hopeful.

"Well, if it's clearly understood that I'm not your husband and you're not my wife, I suppose there's no great harm in your staying here until I leave. That will be as soon as I can. Then, if you wish, you may keep the house. Otherwise, I'll sell it."

She was too desperate to protest, and perhaps she knew he had made more of a concession than he realized.

"Thank you, Winthrop. I'll stay, on those terms, and I shan't bother you in the slightest. If it would relieve your embarrassment to make up a story about me for the servants——"

He walked over to the electric button by the door, and pressed it.

"I'm through with humbug and masquerade," he said, "and if you have any intention of making yourself attractive to me again, you won't suggest that we tell lies to the servants."

Maggie answered his summons.

"Maggie, Mrs. Beauvel, as you know, has gone to Albany this afternoon. This is another Mrs. Beauvel, my first wife, who will stay with us for a few days. I

count on you to take charge of the house, and to make our guest comfortable."

Maggie bowed awkwardly and mumbled an undistinguishable phrase.

"I wish you'd explain the situation to Martha also," he went on. "And in case you yourself ever marry, Maggie, remember that even though you divorce your husband later, it is quite possible to meet him socially."

Isabel blushed under the servant's eyes, but she was too conscious of the danger in his mood to interrupt him. He was getting rid of long-standing irritations. She had no idea how much remained still to rouse in him.

When Maggie had retired, he turned in an easier mood, encouraged by the sense of his own power.

"I hope you agree that we've had enough scenes, either before the servants or between ourselves, and you won't think me too brutal if I repeat that the invitation to stop here, as I told Maggie, is only for a few days. You can guess what sort of town this is; by to-morrow morning every one will know that Mary is gone and that you are stopping with me. Harrington will say I have altogether too many wives. You won't wish to bring upon yourself any of the inconveniences I certainly shall have to face."

She looked at him, not as he would have expected, with resentment at his tone, but with something approaching admiration. He recalled the age-old legend of woman's affection for the male brute. Perhaps he ought to have stepped on her ten years earlier.

"I'll go whenever you say, Winthrop, but so long as you permit, I shall wish to be near you. We haven't seen each other for a long time."

He lost control of himself.

"My God!"

He was at the foot of the stairs, making a dash for his room.

"Winthrop!"

When he turned he saw once again tears, or the pretense of them, and she was holding out her arms, a suppliant. The gesture filled him with inexpressible contempt.

"Don't try that sentimental game with me! You wish to stay, do you, because we haven't seen anything of each other for a long while? I'll bet my last dollar you have another reason for coming back. You will spring it on me when I'm off my guard."

If the day had not been over-full of excitement, he would have denied himself so rough a tone, even to her. As he went on up-stairs he repented of his bad manners. She had shamed him by collapsing into silence, and the sadness in her face, as he turned from her, struck him as abominably genuine.

Until dinner time he shut himself in his room, inventing occupations. Once he heard her come up-stairs, as he thought—she was going to the guest room which now no doubt she felt was her apartment. She would be getting into some fascinating gown, or perhaps into a plaintive creation, to melt him whenever his eyes could not avoid her across the table. . . . He was in the mood for violence. If she did not leave the house after a day or two, he would throw her out. . . . But of course there would be no point in disgracing her immediately. She could have her chance, but if she defied him, and tried to make herself permanent again under his roof, he'd

show her just how much affection was left. . . . He wondered whether Mary was already at the Ten Eyck, and whether she would write to him. If he wrote to her, how should he address the letter? There was a neat problem! In ten years he had never addressed an envelope to her. By Jove! He should have asked what name she would use from now on.

"Dinner is served, sir. Shall I tell Mrs. Beauvel?"

"If you please."

He waited deliberately, to let Isabel get to the dining-room first. If either was to make an impressive entrance, he would do it himself. . . . But when he came down, she was already seated at the table waiting, quite as in the old days, with a scarcely perceptible reproof for his lateness. A long-forgotten instinct returned.

"I beg your pardon," he said.

She smiled forgivingly.

"Not at all."

Good heavens! He was conceding everything. He was apologizing for doing as he chose in his own house! . . . For the rest of the meal he watched himself, and confined his talk to icy civilities. He could see Maggie casting side-glances at the woman and at him, and he hoped the ordeal was telling on Isabel's nerves. Outwardly, however, she remained serene.

They had their coffee in the living room; he told Maggie to bring it there, as usual, and immediately was sorry to be repeating with Isabel a habit which had been pleasant with Mary. If the woman stayed another day, he'd see to it that they drank coffee at the table. . . . It made little difference to her whether or not he talked. There she was, sitting like a member of the family, an

inescapable relative, stirring her coffee and gazing down. Perhaps she considered it triumph enough just to be there.

"If you don't mind, Isabel, I'll go to my room now and finish some work I brought home. You can amuse yourself here, and if you need anything you don't see, Maggie will look after you. Tell her when you want your breakfast. She'll bring it up to you."

With an effort he held out his hand. It had always been his custom to shake hands with guests when he bade them good night.

"I'll come down to breakfast, Winthrop. I'll breakfast with you."

"You needn't bother."

Again he started toward the staircase, and again she stood looking after him, repeating the episode of the afternoon. Once more he was moved to say a parting word.

"You find yourself comfortable in the guest room?"

Now, why on earth did he ask her that? He realized his error when he saw her slowly shaking her head.

"What's the matter with it?"

Her voice trembled.

"It's—it's too far away."

Her impudence was brazen beyond his least flattering calculation. He stamped up the stairs to his room and shut the door with an unnecessary bang.

III

Before she came down, he left the house and took a taxi to his office instead of walking. His mood was that of a frightened child forcing himself toward sure punishment. This would be his critical day. The gossip about Elizabeth's case was as nothing to what would come now, with Mary's departure. Willing as he was to escape Isabel, he had left the house at that hour chiefly because he wished to be the first in the office, before the whispering should begin. As he entered the janitor was finishing the morning's dusting. The fellow looked up quickly at him, ventured a noncommittal good morning, and went on with his work. Winthrop wondered if the man already knew. . . . On the desk was a bundle of letters. He opened them himself and began glancing through them. . . . Business was prospering as usual. Odd that the making of money, which for most men presented difficulties, had been for him automatically easy ever since Isabel had gone away. It was as though fate had desired his undivided attention on his soul agony. . . . As a matter of fact, there hadn't been much agony, just a quiet, dull, drifting, the habit of being slightly worried, with now and then a positive scare, and at last this smash-up. . . . He began making calculations on the pad before him. With the business in such shape, he could probably withdraw from it without losing more than—let's see, how much——?

He was still figuring when his stenographer came in.

She put her hat and coat away, straightened her hair, powdered her nose, opened up her desk and got the machine ready. Was it because he seemed occupied with the mail that she said nothing? Or had she joined his critics?

"When you're ready, Miss Smithers, I'll get these letters off."

Miss Smithers opened her note-book and bent her head to the shorthand. Since she came in she had not once met his eyes.

The bookkeeper was the first person to greet him that day, but he couldn't interpret the salutation as an overture of sympathy, for the man was singularly out of touch with anything that couldn't be set down in columns, and if his best friend had committed murder he probably would not have heard of it. . . . The atmosphere of the office was becoming oppressive. By eleven o'clock Winthrop was grateful for an appointment which would detain him perhaps till after lunch.

On the street, three blocks from the office door, he met Doctor Warren. The old man stopped and laid an affectionate hand on his shoulder.

"What you said at the meeting the other day, Beauvel, does you credit. I won't say you are right, but a little charity does us no harm in this world."

Winthrop gripped his hand without other reply. Doctor Warren kept looking at him.

"And Beauvel—I don't know just how to put it, but you must know there are rumors about your home, and I want the privilege of telling you, you have my entire confidence. You're a straight-shooter. Whatever you're mixed up in, I know is essentially right."

The minister intended to say nothing more, indeed was moving off, but his friendly greeting roused Winthrop to self-defense.

"I *am* in a mess, Doctor, but as you say, it is essentially all right. My first wife, whom I haven't seen for ten years——"

"The one you're divorced from?"

"Yes." It hurt him now to tell the lie. "She came to town night before last and stopped in to pay a friendly visit."

The minister smiled dubiously.

"That's the modern note, I suppose."

Winthrop forgot he was talking to the cloth.

"It's a damned embarrassing note!"

The doctor shook his head.

"I should think it might be."

They paused, each groping for the next remark.

"Mary has gone to Albany for a while."

The doctor understood.

"Well, that's rather wise, isn't it? She must be embarrassed. She's a fine woman, that wife of yours, Beauvel."

This chance meeting shook Winthrop badly. For years he had been misrepresenting his position before these friends of his, but now the falsehood was growing heavy on his conscience. How long could he keep on pretending that Isabel and he were divorced, that he and Mary were married? . . .

When he returned to the office after lunch, the stenographer and the bookkeeper were exchanging excited confidences. This time there could be no mistake —they reddened when he came in, and broke off abruptly.

He sat down at his desk and looked hard at the letters laid out for him to sign.

When Miss Smithers took them away to mail, she hesitated a second.

"I'd like to say, Mr. Beauvel, how proud we are of you for the way you treated Miss Briggs."

He looked up at the girl, immensely relieved.

"Well, I'm glad if you think it was right. I'm awfully sorry for her."

"And Mrs. Beauvel was so kind too. Is it true that she took Miss Briggs home?"

"Yes."

There, another lie! But not so far from the truth this time.

The fact that his secretary still thought well of him, made it possible for Winthrop to finish the day. The little drop of praise was exaggerated in the terrible need he felt just then for aid and encouragement, and by the end of the afternoon he had recovered confidence in himself, and was beginning to form a more courageous plan for his immediate future. He would get rid of Isabel, then he would persuade Mary to return—at least for the rest of that winter; then in the spring they would move away from Harrington, with their reputations secure, and once at a safe distance, he and she could part without exciting comment. If it really was her wish to imitate Isabel's venture, she could go to Europe, and he would try California, perhaps, or Oregon, or some other part of the western coast. A reasonable program, he was sure, and one that Mary would probably agree to.

But at dinner he noticed in Isabel a profound change. She was at her best, unusually considerate, aggressively

conciliatory, in every respect tactful. He wondered if she wished at the moment of parting to inspire him with regret. Well, she'd have to be more of a siren than this, to wheedle him into asking her to stay. But he did admire her spirit. Because she was behaving well, he now found it possible to look at her; the night before, he had kept his eyes averted lest she should misinterpret his glance. . . . The years in Europe had certainly improved her appearance. To be sure she was just so much older, but she didn't look half-way through the thirties. There were new lines in her face, of course, but her body was lovelier than he remembered it, younger, in fact. Perhaps it was the way she carried herself now, or perhaps it was the cut of her foreign gown. In the old days he never would have called her sensuous, not even when he had most admired her appearance, and even now one wouldn't confuse her with Cleopatra, yet there was a slight hint of warmth where once he had encountered a uniform reserve. . . . He was glad that experience had developed her so richly. If ever she could find the right man, perhaps she would even now be happy.

They had their coffee at the table. When he suggested it, she agreed quickly, but that evening she would have conformed to any idea of his. Afterward, when he lighted his cigar, she rose of her own accord and led the way across the hall. He had expected to go directly from the table to his mythical work up-stairs, but if she wished to say good night in the living room it would do just as well, so far as he was concerned. . . . At the point of excusing himself, he recalled the plan he had been formulating during the day.

"Forgive my ungraciousness, Isabel, but you can ap-

preciate that the question is necessary—how long are you staying here?"

"You mean, how soon will I leave?"

"That's what I mean."

She faced him with a look he had never before observed in her, a look which some instinct told him was sincerity at last.

"Winthrop, I shan't leave unless you compel me to."

"That's what I thought!"

"How can I? I love you—I love nothing else—I can be happy nowhere except with you."

It ought not to have been hard for him to tell her the truth, but he found himself suddenly bashful.

"I'm sorry, Isabel, but I don't love you now. That's all gone. I wish you wouldn't talk that way to me."

She began to plead.

"Do you love anybody else, Winthrop? If you had ever really cared for Mary, or she for you, it would be different, but you've been living with her only because it was a convenient way to patch up that old catastrophe of ours. She doesn't love you, or she wouldn't have given you up. If I thought she was really worthy, I believe—yes, I do believe I could be generous enough to stand aside. But nobody can love you as I do. Winthrop, give me another chance!"

Once more he was offended by what seemed to him sheer impudence.

"Isabel, you don't know what love is. Quite true that Mary and I had for each other no romantic heartache, but she gave me more affection than you ever heard of. If you had loved me, you wouldn't have broken into this house and smashed up my life a second time. You're abso-

lutely ruthless. I thought you had come to torture us for revenge, but now I see what your scheme was—you've had enough of rambling, you'd like to settle down again in an American home, and you've elected me once more to be the man of your house. I decline the honor. Let's waste no more breath on it. It would be convenient for me if you went to-morrow."

She pleaded now with something so close to passion that it would have been hard to tell it from the real thing.

"I did come back here to torment you, but that was only a passing meanness; it came to me after I heard at the hotel that Mary was using my name. Can't you understand how that would hurt? If I seem ruthless now, that's the reason—I swear it is! I'll tell you the truth, Winthrop, every word of it. In Europe I thought I had found love. I'd have been glad to give myself to another man if the right one existed. Just before I sailed for home I promised to marry a very wonderful spirit—as much of a saint as one meets on earth. But all the time I was homesick for you, sorry I had been such a fool, more than willing to ask your forgiveness. What I was looking for and couldn't find in the other men was you, and at that I don't think you're such a wonder, Winthrop, when it comes to some kinds of intelligence. I can't idealize you any more as I did when I was a girl—when I say I behaved like a fool over the essay and the Boston trip and the rest, I mean, of course, that you were just as bad, philandering with Mary. But I love you. Even if you make more mistakes I shall still love you. I'm sure it's best for you to take me back—I'll prove it—but for me there's nothing else. If you drive me away,

I have no place to go and no wish to find one. I shall never leave you again, unless you do drive me away."

He saw he had a problem on his hands, a real one at last.

"You know, I don't blame you for anything you did, just as I don't blame Mary, nor myself. It's not a question who made the mistake; the point is I no longer love you—that's all there is to it. If you were my neighbor now, and we saw each other constantly, we might become excellent friends. I never was blind to your merits, nor even to your charms. I knew you were a fine woman, even when I was becoming restless, and later when we were quarreling, but I can't marry every fine woman I know."

He hoped she would be discouraged, but she was not.

"We *are* married," she said, "and I'm not thinking solely of the legal bond. Till the end of time you will be my husband. No matter how far away you think you'd like to segregate yourself, and no matter what other women you take a fancy to, I'm the one you'll consider your wife."

"If you want to give the word such unpleasant meanings, go ahead, but for me a wife implies something infinitely close and tender, and passionate."

"I am your wife."

Since she was so stubborn about it, he would yield to her the last word.

"I'll concede a point and breakfast with you tomorrow, and you can let me know then what train you're leaving on. I'm not sure I can see you off, but I'll look after your baggage."

He couldn't keep from watching the effect upon her.

What strong nerves she had! She even smiled as she said good night.

The papers he had brought home to work on were neither urgent nor interesting, and he would have found it difficult in any circumstances to keep his attention on them for a long evening. Now the calculations came out wrong, and instead of revising them, he sat staring across the room, thinking as he had done that morning of the best way to cover his retreat from Harrington. He was sure now that he must leave, and the prospect gave the foretaste of more pleasure than he had anticipated in anything since his marriage thirteen or fourteen years ago to Isabel. Mary had said that a chapter of his life was finished. How shrewd she was! And he had told Isabel that it was his turn. The words had been instinctive, but now he understood them. Mary would come back for a while, to save appearances, but she would not care to remain, nor would he desire it. He must have a career of his own. Why had he never thought of it before? Odd how a young man is tricked into matrimony and the sedentary life by one partial aspect of nature, by that old urge to mating! During his best years he had abandoned something equally natural and in the end perhaps more valuable, the desire for adventure, curiosity to see the world, hunger for knowledge. If the truth were told, would not half of all young married people be rather glad if for a while they could be relieved of their vows and set free again to roam? And why wouldn't the roaming be good for them? . . . Well, not every man had his luck. Isabel had asked for a second chance at matrimony. Not while he had his wits about him! He saw now, within reach, a rare second chance to complete

his youth, to see the lands he had long heard about, to bring to light those aptitudes in himself which he was aware of but had never examined closely.

As he prepared for bed, his vision kindled a reckless enthusiasm. Why waste time calculating the possible returns from his business? No matter what he could save from the liquidation, a single man needs little to keep body and soul together, and he wouldn't be caring now for material things. A life with no engagements, no school board meetings, no Chamber of Commerce, no letters to answer, no too-familiar neighbors holding one up to their standard——

The door of his room opened slowly, and Isabel came in. He was startled at her loveliness. Under an embroidered negligée she was wearing the simplest and most transparent of robes. She stood before him—was she transfigured, or only crazy?—as though she were the woman of his desire, consenting at last to his worship.

"Well, what's this?"

"It's I, Winthrop."

"I see it is. Why did you come to my room?"

"Because I couldn't stay away. I'm not ashamed to say it. Don't you feel that we belong to each other? If we argue about our love or our hate, we'll be talking till the end of time. Why talk?" She reached out toward him. "You'll know how much you love me—you'll believe me when I say I've wanted only you all these years."

There was something magnificent in the completeness of her avowal, the casting off of false shame, the staking everything on one appeal. He was sorry for her, foreseeing the collapse which must follow when she realized she had made the brave gesture in vain. His firmness was tempered, therefore, with gentle pity.

"I simply can't. Don't believe I misunderstand your motives. It's generous of you to be frank, it's womanly and all that. Don't imagine I misinterpret it. But I can't, Isabel—in the circumstances it wouldn't be moral."

She did not collapse immediately. In fact, she laughed at him.

"You've been living ten years with Mary, yet when your wife comes to your room, you fear it's immoral."

As he spoke he turned his back, partly because he did not care to face that unnatural mirth.

"Yes, in some circumstances, to pretend to love one's wife is immoral."

Just when she left the room, he did not notice. She must have slipped away quietly, to hide her confusion. He was sorry for himself. To have to say no, and to say it so plainly, was most distressing, but he had done right.

But he did not fall asleep so easily as he wished. He lay thinking of her and of Mary, and of his new adventure. The women, rather than the adventure, occupied him now. How much they had changed, both of them, in the ten years, and how little he understood either! They still made him feel as though he were very much outside their thoughts. Until Mary had revealed herself at Isabel's return, he had never suspected that she too cherished an ambition for adventure. Had he guessed, perhaps they could have traveled together. Now that he thought of it, a roving life would have been the easiest, placed as they were. . . . But of course if he had moved around, he could have made no money. On the whole, they had done the practical thing.

As for Isabel this remarkable performance of hers

needed some study. Where did she learn this confidence, not to say boldness? In the old days, even though she read her Ibsen and the other wild books, she had kept the manners of an American. But that sudden appearance at the doorway, those obvious preparations to vamp him—that was like a scene out of a French novel. Where the devil had she picked up those tricks?

He began to wonder about the attempts she had spoken of, to fall in love with European men. He had understood her words in a harmless sense, but could it be possible that she had had affairs? No telling what might have happened to her, unprotected over there, and essentially ignorant of wickedness. Or could it be that the very correct woman who had once been his wife had evolved a philosophy even more liberal than that which he and Mary had feebly tried to defend in the young school-teacher?

These thoughts never once suggested to him a parallel with his own conduct. He did not give Isabel credit for having perhaps made the best of some tragic accident, as he and Mary had striven to do, he did not entertain the idea that, like Elizabeth Briggs, she might have believed herself genuinely in love. He recognized nothing but the possibility that his wife had given herself to other men, and had come back to him in sinister respects a wise woman.

His response to this suspicion was neither anger nor condemnation. He simply grew more and more jealous, more hurt, in a queer, conscious, physical way, at the thought that she, even though he did not love her, could have belonged to any one but him. As he lay awake into the night, or gradually dozed off into a half-

wakefulness, he kept seeing her standing at his door, kept wondering if she had ever appeared so to some other man who had not sent her away.

He came to full consciousness at the sound of a step in the room, and realized with a start that she was standing by his bed. Before he could consider his words, he had repeated his insulting greeting.

"What are you doing in my room?"

She sat down on the bed beside him and began stroking his hair back from his forehead. The tender affection made him angry. He seized her wrist and held it tight. She made no effort to free herself, and ashamed of his violence, he let go.

"I couldn't sleep, Winthrop. I thought you probably couldn't, either."

"So you've come back to have that argument over again!"

"Yes, I've come back. I shall come back as often as you send me away."

"I told you I didn't love you."

She leaned over him so close that her hair brushed his forehead.

"Whether you love me or not, I shall come back. See how I love you!"

She lifted his hand and pressed it against her fast-beating heart.

And how was he to know that he had fallen a victim to the strategy with which Carl had overwhelmed her?

As she lay content in her victory, she could not overlook the fact that Winthrop was still unaware of the exquisite steps by which man should approach ecstasy. Good old Winthrop! She loved him for himself alone.

IV

When Winthrop came down to breakfast next morning he had made up his mind to take charge of his destiny with the same firmness that Isabel was trying on him, and with the same resort to trickery. His great mistake had been to suppose one could deal with women as frankly as with men. What was the use if they all had some secret plan up their sleeve? Now he would try a little trickery himself, or force, if necessary. By fair means or foul he would get Isabel out of the house, and if ever she saw him again it would be because she was cleverer than he.

She was waiting in the living room, fresh and cheerful. When he entered, she put her arms around his neck and kissed him fervently. If he submitted it was because he had counted the stages in his campaign—better to disarm her suspicion until victory was in sight. As they sat down to the coffee and eggs, Maggie observed their harmonious condition.

Before he left for the office he himself suggested that they retire for a moment to the guest room for a private word. The proffer of his confidence made her happy.

"I want to suggest our next step," he said. "You'd better go to Schenectady to-day."

She looked surprised.

"If you stay here," he went on, "there will be an ugly scandal. Gossip has started already. It is to your interest as well as mine to get out with the least commo-

tion. You'll go to Schenectady at once, I'll wind up my affairs and join you there."

He lied now with complete ease. She looked slightly disappointed.

"Then I'm not to see you until you have sold your business here? How long will that take?"

"Oh, a week or two, at the most. I'll make the preliminary arrangements and the lawyer can finish it."

"Two weeks is a long time."

He couldn't resist.

"Is it, after ten years?"

That afternoon he saw her to the train. It gave him no pleasure to expose himself to further talk, and at the station, as he feared, he and she drew an excessive amount of attention, but he wanted to be sure she had really gone. When the train pulled out, he tried not to show his relief.

That night Maggie waited on him with a subdued melancholy, as though there had just been a funeral. Probably she had been giving the day to discussing his affairs with Martha. How could they make anything out of the few things they had observed? Or perhaps they knew that Isabel had come to his room. If by any chance they were awake at the time, and had listened to the conversation——

In the days that followed he found the empty house rather trying with no one to talk to, yet it would have been even less pleasant to look for company outside. The rumors which he had foreseen, quickly gathered strength. Most of his acquaintances believed that Mary had quarreled with him. The adherents of Elizabeth Briggs said that he was at heart ultra-conservative, that Mary's

generosity had been contrary to his wishes, that his support of Elizabeth had been pretended, that really he was as much to blame as any one for her dismissal, and that when Mary discovered his true nature through this incident, she had left him. On the other hand, the defenders of the old order held that Mary had always been somewhat wild, that Winthrop had been patient with her as long as he could, but in this Briggs episode he had naturally been forced to draw the line, and the perfectly just but unwelcome comments he had made to his wife had caused the separation.

Both rumors hurt him, but he could correct neither. He was grateful, however, that so far Isabel figured but slightly in the growing myth. At the hotel she must have conducted herself with dignity. The sentimentalists in the town were, on the whole, rather drawn to her, since she was the original wife. They confided to each other that he was returning to the beautiful romance of his youth, which had been interrupted by a scheming friend with too-modern ideas.

When he announced that he was withdrawing from business in Harrington and that his house was for sale, his friends expressed prompt regret, yet he could see that they thought the action inevitable; in fact, some of them indicated relief that he was departing of his own will. It was quite clear that if he had stayed, his credit in the community, in spite of the sentimental faction, would never again have been so high. Not even with Doctor Warren, as he learned one evening when the minister came in for a moment just before dinner time.

"I want to tell you, Beauvel, I'm sorry you're leaving us. You were doing a fine work in this town, and you

had a brilliant future. It seems to me tragic that it must end."

Apparently the doctor saw no other possibility. Winthrop was interested, but not greatly distressed, to see with what firm hands the doors were closed against him.

"I'm sorry too," he said, "at least, partly sorry. Mary and I shan't forget how kind you and Mrs. Warren have been."

The doctor looked up, surprised at the phrase which linked Winthrop and Mary.

"I thought you and Mrs. Beauvel had separated."

"We have."

"And you're to remarry your first wife?"

Winthrop would have preferred to tell him the truth, would infinitely have preferred it. No man in his Harrington acquaintance deserved confidence more than this sensible minister, who managed to accommodate himself with tact to the trying changes which make modern religion difficult. If he could have confessed to this pastor his soul would have been in peace. On the other hand, it wouldn't do to reveal the plot against Isabel. If he told the truth, that the last of all his intentions would be to remarry his first wife, the doctor might let the news get out and Isabel might take alarm. Nothing for it but to keep his own counsel.

"Yes," he said, "we are to be remarried as soon as Mary and I are divorced."

Doctor Warren shook his head sadly.

"I'm an old man, Beauvel, and this sort of thing hurts. I'm very fond of your second wife. She seemed to me the kind of woman who wouldn't allow your life or hers to get into a tangle. She's most intelligent, and she was

devoted to you. On the other hand, if I had known your first wife, I dare say I might have admired her. Naturally, I don't believe in divorce, but if I'm sorry to see you and Mary separating, I suppose I ought to congratulate you on getting back the first one. It's quite a tangle, isn't it? You feel it yourself, don't you? You don't think I'm merely a narrow-minded old preacher?"

He held out a cordial hand, which Winthrop grasped and for a moment clung to.

"No, it's a real tangle, all right. . . . And thanks for what you've said."

Doctor Warren turned toward the door.

"I'll miss you."

Winthrop was sad to see him go.

"Couldn't you stay for dinner? I'm alone, you know."

"Thanks, Beauvel, but I can't to-night—expected at home."

He hurried away, and Winthrop knew the invitation had frightened him. Kind as the old man was, he preferred not to be dining with so dubious a character as this husband with intermittent wives.

The next few days went by more easily. He grew callous to the silent criticism of his neighbors, and as he made progress in closing his affairs, the danger of inconvenience lessened. But when he looked at his mail one morning, he was startled to see two envelopes left unopened on the pile. One of them came from the Ten Eyck, in Albany. Over the hotel name on the envelope was written clearly, "Mary Allerton." Miss Smithers had recognized the hand, if not the name. The other letter came from Schenectady. Over the hotel name on the envelope was printed out boldly, "Mrs. Winthrop

Beauvel." He felt flushed and annoyed as he opened the two documents. No doubt the office were watching him. He read Mary's letter first.

Dear Winthrop: I am embarrassed to trouble you these days, when I am sure you have too much already to distract you. I'm afraid the bank has lost my address, or something, but the money you were to ask them to forward, has not reached me. Will you remind them about it?

That was all, no word of affection or regret. He unfolded Isabel's letter.

When are you coming? It seems a long time. Do hurry!

And Winthrop dear, I enclose a note which came to me by mistake. I forgot to tell you I left my forwarding address with the Harrington post-office. Of course I read the note before I realized for whom it was intended. Winthrop, if she has only six hundred dollars, she can't go very far. Oughtn't we to give her something?

He searched again in the envelope and found the note she referred to, brief communication from the Harrington First National informing Mrs. Winthrop Beauvel of the name of the Albany bank to which they had transferred her account of $631.14. He looked up toward Miss Smithers, then remembered that the replies he must now write should remain private. In his own hand he answered both women, and carried the letters out in his pocket to mail. To Mary he forwarded the notice, with an explanation of its delay, and he added an offer of more money whenever she should need it. It was hard

to find words for the proposal, and try as he might to be tactful, he knew she would decline with indignation. To Isabel he sent a curt acknowledgment, explaining that one couldn't wind up a business in a day, and it wasn't for her to be so impatient, after keeping him waiting for a decade. That last touch, he thought, ought to please her—she would drag a compliment out of it.

But Mary's financial difficulties were brought home to him once more, a day or so later, when simultaneously he received another letter from her and an inquiry from his lawyer. She declined his offer, of course. The lawyer wished to know what was to be done with the property held in the name of Mr. and Mrs. Beauvel. Very discreetly he suggested that the Mrs. Beauvel referred to in the deeds was Mary, whereas the Mrs. Beauvel to whom Winthrop might wish the property to go was Isabel.

Winthrop thought it over, walking back to the house, and through the hours of his solitary evening this new entanglement bothered him. Only one thing was clear: the money did not belong to Isabel. If she should hear of it, what would her attitude be? As his legal wife, could she lay claim to all he had intended for Mary?

After another talk with the lawyer next day, his doubts were increased. Evidently he must engage in some kind of litigation, resort to the courts. He had invested his money in such a way that it would need more than Mary's cooperation to divide it. Even if he could persuade her to take her share, what was the value of her share? He couldn't see why it would be difficult to sell the property and give her half the profits, but the lawyer wanted to know what Isabel would say. In fact,

the lawyer asked a number of questions which he parried, but which made him wonder whether the man suspected that Mary had never really been his wife. . . . He came away from that interview discouraged.

In the course of a week he received a second message from Isabel, demanding once more how soon he would arrive in Schenectady. The letter was brought to his desk while the lawyer was seated at his side, examining with him again the question of Mary's rights. He was too exasperated to reply. If Isabel had nothing to do but think of herself and bother him, it wasn't worth while observing the civilities.

But when he had kept her waiting to the end of her patience, she returned to Harrington. He found her one evening, entirely at home in his living room.

"I knew something unpleasant must be detaining you," she said, "and perhaps I could help if I came back. What is it, Winthrop dear?"

He stood in the doorway looking at her, his overcoat still on, his hat in his hand.

"I told you what's the matter—a man can't wind up his business in a day. I told you I'd come as soon as I was free."

"But you take so long, Winthrop, and I'm terribly lonely. You don't mind my coming back, do you?"

"Certainly I mind! If it were proper for you to visit me here, I shouldn't have sent you away. The gossip still goes on about us three, and it will do neither you nor me good to add fuel to it."

She pretended to be penitent.

"I'm sorry if I've embarrassed you."

He walked to the end of the hall and put away his hat and coat, then came back to where she was sitting.

"I must ask you once more, Isabel, that ugly-sounding question—how long do you intend to stay?"

His earnestness now seemed to amuse her—the penitence disappeared.

"Winthrop, don't you think I'd better stay until you can take me back to Schenectady yourself, or wherever the place is that you've selected for our home?"

"In plain words, you intend to stay until I take you to Schenectady?"

"That's what I'd like."

"I'm going to Schenectady to-night," he said. "We'll leave on the eleven o'clock train."

His decision was satisfactory to her. What she wanted, of course, was not a longer stay in Harrington, but his society.

During the dinner she did the talking for both. He from absent-mindedness rather than from intention, let her remarks go unanswered. But once when Maggie was temporarily out of the room, she spoke of Mary.

"Winthrop, what does she live on? In Fairfax I know she was rather poor, and for years she has written nothing. Did you give her money?"

"That," he said, "is none of your business."

She overlooked his rudeness.

"I know it isn't, but I thought perhaps you'd understand I was speaking out of friendship and sympathy. If you gave her enough to live on, it's only what you should have done. If she is in need now, I'd rather have you turn over to her everything you have than give her

the excuse to say or even to feel that we owe her anything."

Her attitude relieved him. Then she wouldn't object to Mary's taking her share in the property.

"As a matter of fact, Isabel, it's precisely this question that has kept me in Harrington."

He told her briefly of the property owned in Mary's name and his.

"You see, we called ourselves Mr. and Mrs. Beauvel. She's down in the deeds as my wife."

Isabel's eyes flashed.

"I suppose then, I'm the real owner of it."

Had she drawn him into a trap?

"I believe you could be very disagreeable about it if you wish."

"Don't be alarmed, I shan't wish. We'll give her all that belongs to her, and more."

Then it wasn't a trap—or not that kind, anyway.

"There's another difficulty, Isabel. After the property is disentangled, I'm not sure Mary will accept a cent from me. When I offered money to her at the train, she refused."

Isabel was happy and confident.

"Here's where I can help. She'll accept it from me. Where is she now?"

He was wondering how she could think Mary would take money from her more easily than from him.

"Where is she staying, Winthrop?"

"In Albany."

"At a hotel?"

"Yes."

"Do you know which one?"

"The Ten Eyck, I believe."

He gave the name reluctantly, yet if Isabel wanted to see her, why should he keep them apart?

At the station Isabel excused herself for a few minutes, and disappeared toward the news stand.

"You don't want anything to read, do you? Wait, I'll get it for you."

"I'd rather get it myself, thanks."

He might have followed, if Doctor Warren had not passed by.

"Hello, Beauvel, you're not leaving so soon, are you?"

"No, just going to Schenectady for the night."

"Good. So am I. I'll see you on the train. Shall we smoke before turning in?"

Winthrop nodded assent, wondering whether he could get away from Isabel long enough to enjoy a cigar, and wondering on the other hand whether the doctor's invitation were not merely a sportsmanlike gesture, which ought to be accepted and afterward ignored.

"If we don't meet on the train," he said, "perhaps we could lunch together some day soon, when I get back."

"Glad to."

The doctor hesitated a moment, then asked:

"You haven't heard anything from Elizabeth Briggs, have you?"

"No."

"How's Mary?"

"Very well, so far as I know. She has written to me only about a few business matters."

"Well, Beauvel, you know how I feel. I'm awfully

sorry for you and for her, and I hope this time you'll make a go of it with the first one. After these experiments, you ought to know your taste."

Isabel was standing behind him, with some magazines under her arms. Winthrop saw no way to avoid introduring her.

"Doctor Warren," he said, "this is my first wife."

The doctor turned sharply, embarrassed.

"Very glad to meet you, Mrs. Beauvel. . . . I didn't know you were in Harrington."

She smiled graciously.

"Just here for the day. Winthrop and I are going back to Schenectady now."

The doctor looked from one to the other. Winthrop knew what was in his thought—he was remembering that these two people were not yet remarried, yet they were traveling on night trains together. He wished them a happy journey, and hurried on.

"That's the last time he'll ever speak to me!"

"Why so, Winthrop?"

"Because I am traveling with my wife."

"I don't understand that at all."

For a second he wondered how much she knew of his thoughts and of the prejudices which she had aroused to his discomfort; but in a little while it would all make no difference, anyway.

At the hotel where she was staying he took a room and slept late into the next morning. When he knocked at her door toward ten o'clock, she was busy with her typewriter, as in Fairfax days. She looked up with an affectionate smile.

"Isabel, shall you and I always be seeking explana-

tions, or shall we ever be ready to take each other for granted?"

"I think I understand you now, Winthrop, but you don't understand me."

"Well, the point is that I must go back to Harrington and finish that business, and I don't want you to send exasperating notes asking how soon it will be finished, and still less will I have you looking me up as though I were a fugitive. If you don't trust me, we'll say good-by now and part for good."

He had expected her to resist what he wanted to sound like an ultimatum, but she ignored the challenge.

"I hope you won't go back to Harrington till the afternoon."

"Why not?"

"Because Mary is coming over from Albany to lunch with us."

"She is? She accepted an invitation from you to lunch with us?"

Isabel smiled her kindest.

"It's about that money, Winthrop. I shall have no peace of mind until we arrange it. I sent a telegram from the station last night asking her to take the nine-thirty train."

"Oh, but she won't. I'll stake my last dollar she'll answer no such summons from you."

"But I signed *your* name, Winthrop. Of course it's not strictly my business, but I sent the telegram to help you. I said you were in trouble and needed her aid."

V

"Isn't it time for us to go down?"

"I ordered the lunch in my room," said Isabel.

He made no answer. He was reviewing once more his own campaign. Mary would arrive any minute now, if she were answering Isabel's appeal; he would let her think the telegram had really come from him—no use to exhibit before her the predicament he was floundering in. And he would join Isabel in urging her to accept the money—in fact, he ought to speak first and make the plea come from himself. He might even pretend he had insisted upon Isabel's presence in order that Mary might be sure there would be no jealousy on the part of her successor. . . . Then he would run away. He sought no handsomer words for it—he would disappear, change his name, hide his life beyond Isabel's reach.

"If it would be easier for you to persuade Mary without me in the room, I could leave for a few minutes."

"You needn't. She'll listen to my arguments, even if you are here."

"Well, if it should appear that my going out might help, I'll find an excuse."

He answered her without turning around. Across the street he saw Mary leaving a taxi. The driver had stopped on the wrong side, and she would have to cross on foot. Even from that angle, looking down, he recognized something of the sprightliness which had been her character before their long experiment in sincerity. Just

these few weeks away from him had restored her. It hurt him to think so. He faced Isabel.

"Mary is coming up."

"Good. I'll telephone for the lunch now. And, as I said, if she won't agree to our proposal, I'll step out of the room, and you see what you can do."

He was now so suspicious of her remarks, even of the most obvious, that he asked himself what snare might lie behind this latest proposal. Had she some thought of surprising him, of coming back when he did not look for her, and so learning more than she now knew about Mary's feelings for him? . . . She was trying to call the office, but there was a mix-up on the wire. He listened to her expostulation.

"What's that? I want the restaurant, please. Oh, some one calling? Oh, yes. Ask her to come right up. Mr. Beauvel is here."

She turned toward him, triumphantly.

"Miss Mary Allerton wishes to see Mr. Winthrop Beauvel."

He knew she was gloating over the return to Mary's old name. She had driven her rival back where she belonged.

"You women can be pretty mean to each other, can't you?"

She feigned bewilderment.

"Mean? How?"

"We'll have time to discuss it later, if discussion is needed."

She went to the door and opened it, so that Mary could find the room easily. He remembered other days after that Boston trip when his door had not offered so

eager a hospitality to this woman who was now walking along the carpeted hall.

When she saw Isabel, she started, but immediately regained her composure.

"I didn't know you were here," she said. "I came in response to this telegram."

She held out the yellow page, as once she had shown for her credentials his white letter. He was half afraid that Isabel would not refrain from a sharp reply, but evidently she was resolved to make this interview a success.

"I feared you would be surprised," she said, "yet I hoped you wouldn't altogether mind. Winthrop told me about the telegram; in fact, he sent it with my complete sympathy. Now please consider me out of the picture for the moment and do what he wants you to, as though I didn't exist."

So eager was she to get at the matter in hand that she had detained Mary just inside the door. They stood there facing each other. Winthrop intervened.

"Let Mary take off her things and let's get some lunch. We can talk later."

It had always been a mystery to him how women could invent conversation on the eve of a critical battle. Here they were, the two, chattering politely about the trivial, just because the waiter was bringing in the table and serving the meal. He knew how quickly the true subject would break as soon as they three were alone. Though he intended to speak first, before Isabel could compromise the situation, he would have preferred to wait until they had had their coffee, but Mary was thinking of her train.

"I want to be in Albany again for dinner, Winthrop. Can you tell me now what help it is you think I can give?"

He put the matter quickly, in the plainest terms.

"The property can't very well be divided," he said, "without your aid, since it is partly in your name. Isabel, of course, might make some legal objections, but I'm glad to say she has no intention of doing so. If you'll join me now in the proper request to the court, our investment can be divided, and I'll give you your share in cash. Some of the property I'd rather not sell just now—its value may increase."

She listened attentively, until his last word.

"You wish me to make a legal claim to part of your investments?"

"I wouldn't put it that way, but perhaps the lawyer would."

"You know I can do nothing of the kind. Why should I claim anything of yours? You owe me nothing."

"But the idea is for us to put in a joint claim, to ask the court for a just separation of our rights, that's all."

"But I can't!"

Isabel interrupted.

"You mean you won't, Mary?"

"No, I can't. It would cost me too much of my self-respect to admit to the world what I would not admit to you, that Winthrop owes me a cent. We were comrades in a sort of shipwreck and we helped each other. Money had nothing to do with it."

They waited a moment, brought to a full stop. . . . When Isabel spoke, her tone startled Winthrop, it indi-

cated so much feeling, so much—he hesitated to use her word—so much humility.

"Mary," she said, "this request comes to you from Winthrop, who perhaps has the right to ask a favor. I have no right at all. Whatever misery you have passed through I am to blame for. I made use of your friendship to save my silly cowardice and to sustain my vanity, and I seized upon your misfortune as an excuse to do precisely as I liked. You may have suspected this, but now I confess it. Yet though I have no claim on you, I beg this favor for myself as well as for Winthrop. His reason in offering the money is, I suppose, a wish to be just, as well as to see you in the same comfort as he and I enjoy. My reason for asking your help now, is that I'd like to lift some of the weight from my conscience."

The unexpected confession struck him with more force than it did Mary.

"I can't do it," she repeated. "As for these matters of conscience, I suspect we are all equal and need no readjustment. If I cared to be introspective I could blame myself, and Winthrop probably thinks he was rather foolish, at least at the beginning. I ought to have told Winthrop all the facts when in Boston instead of masquerading for one unlucky hour as the brilliant essayist; you ought to have shown him the essay as soon as you wrote it; he should have told you the thoughts the essay roused in him. But at the moment we all believed we were acting for the best, and perhaps we were. Since I left Harrington I've been seeing in a clearer perspective this whole section of our lives. From the moment Isabel put into our heads the notion of sincerity, we all went wrong, trying to act a theoretical logic and forget-

ting our involuntary habits and our undeveloped impulses. When Isabel returned a few weeks ago, it struck me that she had fallen back upon her instincts at last, and would succeed now in being herself simply because she would throw theory to the wind. We've stopped being sincere and can therefore be natural again. I'm satisfied. I'm back where I started, having had a good deal of experience, the merit of which is that I don't wish to repeat it. But I've lost nothing; I can't even say I've lost the time. It's rather agreeable to know that I'm no richer and no poorer than at the beginning. A gift from Winthrop now would disturb my equilibrium."

He waited for Isabel to reply, but she was still pondering the argument.

"I shan't debate it with you," he said. "I shall only ask, once more, a favor. If you have no use for the property, give it away. How you dispose of it does not interest me, but I'd like to possess some of that equilibrium of soul which you have reached, and I can't attain it unless I may express gratitude for what you did for me. Not gratitude only, of course—you deserve everything I have, and more."

Perhaps Isabel thought she was moved by his request.

"Do take the money, Mary, as Winthrop says, for his peace of mind. I know how this troubles him. He feels it's only what you earned."

"Earned? How?"

"Why, by acting as his wife."

Mary rose so quickly, she upset the glass of water by her plate.

"You want me to accept pay for living with him?

Winthrop, did you ask me to come here for this insult?"

Isabel was frightened.

"I didn't mean it that way, Mary—God knows I didn't mean it that way! I wouldn't say such a thing to any one! I was thinking of the housekeeping, and all that."

"Whatever you were thinking of," said Winthrop, "you've got the whole question now in the wrong key. After that, she won't take a cent from me."

"I certainly will not! Even if you swear now you didn't mean it, you'd repeat the remark some day when you're irritated, and if I took the money I could never answer you."

Under her indignation Isabel wilted, and under the anger that blazed at her in Winthrop's look.

"Mary, how can you think I have a more-righteous-than-thou attitude?"

"You have a very unpleasant attitude. I don't know how righteous it is."

Isabel was deciding whether or not to confess. Both guessed in advance what she would say.

"Your life with Winthrop," she began at last, "is a good deal better than my life abroad. To show you how sincere I am, how deeply I wish you to accept this money which is yours, I'll tell you something I'd rather have kept from Winthrop, something I never expected to tell any one. But if I make a clean breast of it, even though Winthrop may refuse now to take me back, I shall have paid my share of the debt."

Mary sat down again at the table.

"Don't tell me, Isabel. Confessions relieve our feel-

ings at the moment, but later you'll wish you had kept the secret. It would do me no benefit, and why hurt Winthrop?"

But he insisted on hearing.

"Let's get everything out of our systems now," he said, "once for all. Don't consider my feelings. If there's a spot on me that isn't scarred already, I don't know where it is."

Now Isabel was hesitating.

"Perhaps I said too much—it's useless to go on."

"Don't mind me," said Winthrop. "I probably suspect worse things than the truth. The least that you could confess would be that you had a lover."

She was relieved that he guessed her secret.

"You say that's the least, Winthrop? What could be worse?"

"Several lovers. How many were there?"

"Only one. . . . Winthrop, I was a perfect fool! I fell into the simplest kind of treachery, let him help himself, as though I knew nothing at all of life."

"No more you did!"

She did not enjoy his way of taking the heroic truth-telling.

"Well," she said, "that's all. I mentioned it just to assure Mary that I have done worse things than she, and if she fears I ever should reproach her, she has this weapon in her hands to strike me down."

She thought Mary might have reached to her a cordial hand, or made some other gesture of sympathy, but her rival would not be won.

"I'm not afraid of what you may whisper against me, Isabel. It can't be worse than what other people have

said during these ten years, and nothing could hurt so much as to be paid in cash for the human sympathy Winthrop and I gave each other."

There was no arguing with her. They sat out a long silence. . . . Winthrop wondered why Isabel made no move to leave the room. He wanted a word with Mary alone, not exclusively now to argue with her about the property. Perhaps Isabel, with the uncanny instinct of woman, suspected his thoughts. . . . Listening to Mary, thinking over what Isabel had just told him about her life abroad—and God knows she probably was keeping most of it back, no matter how frank she pretended to be—he wondered whether even yet he knew his own heart. This adventure which he was looking forward to—he caught himself wishing he could confide the plan to Mary. He had the habit now of confiding in her. . . . It would be rather pleasant to take that afternoon train to Albany.

"Isabel, would you mind letting me speak with Mary alone? Perhaps I can persuade her."

"By all means."

Her tone was chilly. They had not arranged where she should go, but she stepped out into the hall and closed the door behind her. He waited a minute, then went to the door himself, opened it, looked up and down. She had disappeared. When he turned back to Mary, he was ashamed of his suspicion.

"Really, Winthrop," she was smiling as she spoke, "I hardly think she'd listen at the keyhole."

He went over to the table where she sat, leaned down and kissed her. If she objected, at least she remained tranquil under the caress.

"She won't approve, Winthrop, and between us, you know, all that is finished."

He went to the other side of the table and faced her.

"About this business tangle, Mary, there's one thing Isabel doesn't know, or I'm afraid she might have hurt you with it. If you won't join us in a suit to have the property divided, I'm not sure I can get my money out. At least it will be extremely awkward."

She looked surprised.

"Oh, if it's to help you get your money, Winthrop——"

"Now, don't think I care anything about that! I'd like to give it all to you, if you'd take it. But from the practical standpoint, you see now why I need your help. Without you those investments are tied up."

"But Isabel is your wife. She can get it out, it's in her name."

He shook his head.

"The lawyer thinks as they all do, that Isabel and I were divorced and that you and I were married. Legally, it's your property, not Isabel's, unless I tell them the truth."

She hesitated a moment.

"Won't they learn the truth sooner or later, if we go into court?"

"I hadn't thought of that. Naturally, I couldn't ask the lawyer without telling him too much."

Now they both were silent.

"Oh, well, then, Mary, let's drop it all. The investment means nothing to me in comparison with your happiness. I'll sacrifice the whole thing gladly."

He started toward the door.

"Where are you going?"

"To call Isabel and tell her how we have reached an end."

"One moment," she said. "If we are still afraid of the truth, the end isn't reached yet. What is troubling you is not the money, it's that secret about your life and mine. Because of it you can't even deal with your lawyer. . . . Winthrop, I see land—the expiation must be complete! Go to him now, tell our story, ask him to keep the secret if he can, but if necessary let him publish it to the court or to the world. Then wind up your affairs. Isabel will never appreciate my reason for doing what you ask, but you will understand."

He went around to her side of the table and bent down once more to kiss her, but she held him gently away and laid a finger of the other hand on her lips.

"Forbidden!" she said.

He turned from her and walked over to the window.

"Winthrop, if I understand Isabel's attitude, you and she will resume your old life together?"

"*She* thinks so, but she doesn't know me."

He faced about for the last time and would have told her then of his plan for escape, but she was laying again that finger on her lips, the signal of warning, and in her eyes he saw her familiar kindness shining ambiguously as encouragement or as sympathy. He would have asked which, had not Isabel at that moment returned.

THE END